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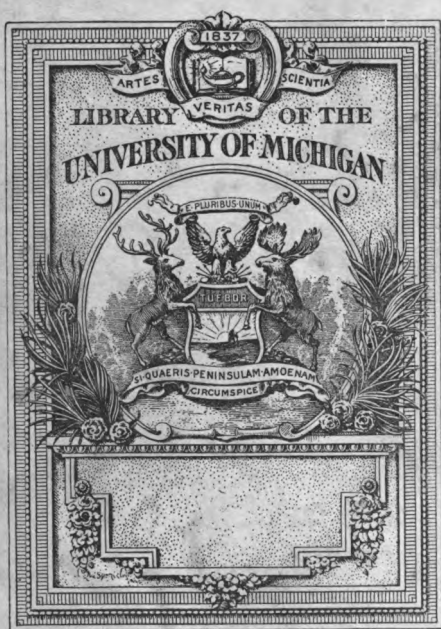
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Thomas Becket martyr patriot



THOMAS BECKET

MARTYR PATRIOT

BY

ROBERT ANCHOR THOMPSON, M.A.

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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PREFACE.

LIVES of Archbishop Becket and discussions of them have been so many, that some apology may be necessary for another.

It is an easy task. We have it on the authority of Mr. Freeman: "There is scarcely any man of past times, for estimating whose life and character we have such ample means. . . . We know all about everybody and everything. . . . As to mere matters of fact, the points of controversy are exceedingly few."

But he adds: "The peculiarity of the history is, that, with the same facts before them, no two people seem to be content to draw the same inferences."

Truth is single, but attractive: error manifold and repulsive. There is scope, it appears, for further discussion; unless we are to infer that the case is hopeless, and the real Becket an insoluble problem.

It is not a likely inference; it becomes very unlikely when we find that writers of reputation, with all the ample sources of information in their hands, have made

many mistakes in matters of plain fact. Discordant conclusions then follow as of course.

If there is still scope for discussion, there is good cause for it. Becket, in himself, is a man worth knowing. To Englishmen all the great men are worth knowing,—above others, the great and true men,—who have made the story of their forefathers one in which they can find some interest and some pride.

Yet, after all that has been written of him, the study of this man, under any form of the materials for it within reach, is, to the general reader, an impossibility. Certain simple facts have been told many times, both fairly and intelligibly, as they were forty years ago by Dr. Giles. But a large portion of the materials, and some of the more important of them, are to be gathered from many hundreds of Latin letters, some of them very long, written both by the principal actors in the events, and by eye-witnesses of their remarkable scenes.

Dr. Giles and others have published translations of some of them. But even so it takes time and pains, which few readers can afford, to gather the true purport from a voluminous correspondence.

In the present little work it has been attempted to draw out the important substance of the letters in a fair and often literal translation of their own words.

The resulting story is that of a man who was not, and who never thought himself, and never aspired to be, a saint to be worshipped in ages following ; but who, also, was not that impossible combination of incongruous

qualities, in which later times have represented him. He was a human being,—of no ordinary type, it is true, and therefore sure to be misunderstood; yet of a character, if rare, at least perfectly intelligible.

No bit of history rests upon better evidence. The contemporary biographers, severally and combined, bear their plain marks of candour and truthfulness. They are confirmed by the annalists, sometimes from independent sources of information, and are fully vindicated and illustrated by the fresh and lucid narratives of the correspondence.

To many readers it will support their credibility, that they give us simple, straightforward narratives of common facts, unmixed with the tales of miracles, which sprung up abundantly after the catastrophe. The books of miracles stand apart. The biographies are, for that age, singularly free from them; much more so than the annals and chronicles, which, for centuries, are the only sources of English history.

These pages, written in 1884, arose unsought in the course of a larger reading of mediæval authorities, and under no intention of making a book of them. They are issued with no pretension to be exempt from the errors and oversights incidental to most writers, especially among many sources of information; but, it is hoped, not till after sufficient care and attention, to have left no errors materially important to their main purpose.

The letters contained in the seventh volume of the

"Materials" of Robertson and Sheppard, published in 1885, bring to light some interesting facts hitherto generally overlooked. These facts, found to be in accord with the writer's previous conclusions, have strengthened his conviction that his view of the great Englishman of the twelfth century is substantially the true one.

Authorities.—The "Materials for the History of Thomas Becket," with the correspondence (7 vols.); the Icelandic Life; and also the annals and chronicles, and other works referred to, with a few exceptions, are printed in the great and valuable series of national "Chronicles and Memorials," published under the direction of the Master of the Rolls.

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CHAPTER I.

ENGLAND AFTER A HUNDRED YEARS OF THE NORMAN-FRENCH.

DURING the century following the Norman Conquest, and long after it, England was inhabited by two distinct, although kindred peoples, the conquerors and the conquered people, calling themselves the French and the English.

Two peoples,
English and
French, in
England.

The old English people were reduced to a condition of miserable dependence upon foreign lords, most of them to a condition of serfdom, sinking deeper and deeper towards slavery, in the land which for centuries they had made their own.

The French
are masters.

Before the end of the Conqueror's life, the lordships of English lands, with exceptions thinly scattered over the country, had, by one means or another, been transferred to the foreigners who had taken part in the Conquest on the condition of sharing in the spoils.

They took the general name of Frenchmen. For

centuries the owners of the soil of England called themselves and were called "the French." To call one of them an Englishman was a heinous insult. The very name was held in contempt.

The chief losers by the Conquest were the old English lords of lands. Many of them perished; many fled abroad; not a few survived among the various conditions of tenants, or even below them.

Their successors in their lordships were men of Norman or other foreign blood, the offspring of adventurers from many provinces, mostly of France, but of other countries also, who "came over with the Conqueror." In the families where, from marriages of convenience, English blood had got into their veins, they ignored it and were ashamed of it. Norman-French had been the conquerors, and were the commanding people.

The Norman king claims all the land as his own.

The Conqueror William and his successors claimed the whole of the soil of England as their own estate—*Terra mea*. The great bulk of the lordships he bestowed upon a few hundreds of lords, his "tenants in chief," who held them subject to the dues and services of a feudatory to his lord and king. A multitude of estates were given to his dependents and servants, some to eleemosynaries—these last, most of them, of English race. He took for himself the lordships of, it is estimated, 1422 manors, including many

towns. Some of the towns and manors he and his lords kept in their own hands. They collected their rents and cultivated their lands by bailiffs, who rendered the returns in money or in kind. For some time after the Conquest every king's estate contributed its settled quota of provisions to the royal household. But the greater number of the manors were in the hands of tenants, held, for the most part, at a customary quit-rent, besides the feudal dues and services to the lord.

Among the greater tenants there remained a considerable number of Englishmen ; probably less than half of them were English when the Conqueror died. But this is a doubtful question, not likely to be solved.

It is certain, however, from evidences many and various, that as the king, in the years following his conquest, dispossessed more and more of the English lords, and put foreigners in their place, so the French lords, as time went on, managed to eject Englishmen more and more from the larger tenancies, and to have their estates in the hands of Frenchmen, of their kith and kin ; or, otherwise, of Englishmen who had managed so far to conciliate their masters, and to identify themselves with them, as to be able to call themselves French.

We have a miserable picture of the dependence of the English upon the French, in a well-known

Constant encroachment of the French upon the English,

who are at their mercy.

writer of about a century after the Conquest.* The men who fought at Hastings lost all hope of keeping their estates and incomes. They were held fortunate to have their lives among their enemies. Others who had not taken part, or had not been able to take part, in the fatal fight, might keep their possessions, but only for their lifetime. The land was the king's, and they had lost all right of inheritance in their families, unless at the pleasure of the lords set over them by the king.

As was natural, bitter enmity ensued between intruded lords and native tenants, and frequent assassinations. The tenants, oppressed and driven from their estates, complained to the king, and were told, for their consolation, that they had no lawful rights of inheritance, but would be protected in all they could obtain by good behaviour to their lords and agreement with them. What oppression and tyranny must have had sway under such an edict, what arbitrary fines must have been exacted as the price of continuance upon the soil, it is as difficult to imagine, as it is scantily told us. It is more than probable that before the end of that century, not only all the lords, but almost all the considerable tenants, were either French or called themselves French.

The first Henry, among his early efforts to gain supporters, gave his promise to maintain all tenants,

* *Dialogus Scaccarii*, 10; in *Madox' Excheq.*, ii. p. 391.

French and English, in hereditary possession of their lands, subject always to a lawful and reasonable "relief" to the lord. It was a promise not easy of performance. The lords took their own views of what was fit, and could turn the "reasonable relief" into an enormous death-tax.

Among the smaller tenants, there can be no doubt that a larger number of Englishmen were able to maintain themselves in their old homes. In some parts of the country, a middle class of small freeholders, the greater number of them of Danish or Anglo-Danish origin, are still in possession in the Domesday record. There are more of them in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, the chief districts of the Dane-law, than in all the rest of England. How many of them remained a hundred years afterwards is another problem not easy of solution.

Beneath the tenants was the mass of the old English people, the labourers and tillers of the soil; sprung some of them from the small English freeholders, but mostly from the various classes of the ancient peasantry, crushed by the Norman masters into the one class of the villani, villains, villeins, or villagers. The word "villager" is as nearly descriptive of their actual position as either "villein" or "villain," and is more convenient. "Villain" is now restricted to a baser signification, and "villein" is not easily distinguished from it.

The villagers were the tillers of the ground.

Small free-
holders.

The English
labourers.

They worked for their lords and masters under a hard service, doing all the labour of the manor, of which the lord or the tenant had the profit ; and they had for their wages the right of common, and a piece of arable, which they tilled among them, for their maintenance. They had their rights in the land, after the Conquest, as before it ; and their hardest service, when kept within lawful service, was not so hard as that of labouring men has been, under landlords and farmers, in far more recent times.

But the English people, villagers as well as tenants, had hardships and miseries to endure, far beyond the limits of lawful service. For a time, they were not, either of them, lawfully at the mercy of their masters and lords. The Conqueror did not overthrow the social fabric which he found established. The old Teutonic co-partnership of lords and workers in the lands of the vill or manor was, for some time at least, maintained. The villagers did all the work, and the lord had the lion's share of the produce and profits. But the workers had their homes or hovels, and their rights of portion upon the land to which they were tied. They could not leave it without the lord's consent ; but neither, except in rare instances, could they desire to leave the only place in which they had any rights, and were able, with hard labour, to support themselves.

But, during the century following the Conquest, the foreign masters were continually encroaching, not only upon the rights of the old tenants, but also upon those of the villagers ; until, at the end of that time, the villagers were reduced to the condition of slaves, and could be bought and sold as chattels.* Reduced to slavery.

At that time, and long afterwards, the bulk of the population consisted of a race of lords and great tenants, who spoke French and called themselves Frenchmen ; with, beneath them, a mixed race of smaller tenants, and, lower still, the most numerous class, the labourers, who spoke English and called themselves Englishmen, and were not ashamed of the name. It was long before the two races were even so far united as to regard themselves as one English people.

Under such relations as existed between the two peoples, an amalgamation of the races, except among the middle class in town or country, could proceed but very slowly, and could hardly ever be more than partial. Fusion of the races slow and partial.

In the middle classes, no doubt, intermarriages soon became frequent ; and it is within these limits that we must understand another statement of the writer already quoted—that, among freemen, it had become difficult to show who was English, and who was Norman. He is speaking of a law of the

* Dial. Scac. ; Madox, ii. p. 203.

Conqueror for putting a check upon the assassinations of Normans, which made the local hundred responsible if the murderer was not found, and held every murdered man to be a Norman unless he was proved to be an Englishman. "Proof of Englishry" was required; and this would become a difficulty in the middle classes, while there were still distinct races above and below them. No one can doubt, and the writer admits it, that all the villagers were English. It is not less certain that the upper classes long called themselves French.

' The two races lived side by side throughout the country, and regarded themselves as distinct and hostile peoples. We shall meet with other evidence that the French in England, in the reign of Henry II., considered themselves—as every royal proclamation, *Francis et Anglis*, and every official document addressed them and spoke of them—a race distinct from the despised English, of whom they lived in constant suspicion and distrust. After some generations, the English people acquiesced in sullen submission; but it was not till three centuries after the Conquest, when the English arrows at Cressy and Poitiers reversed the old tradition of conquerors and conquered, that the lords began to call themselves Englishmen, of one people with their serfs. Thenceforward, it came to be a distinction of class, and not of race, to be descended from one of the Conqueror's men.

The total, although, in most of the counties, stealthy and gradual, ejection of a great nation of landowners from their lands was not effected without enormity of suffering. No book in the world covers so huge a mass of misery, thinly disguised under its cold curt phraseology, as the great terrier of the Norman king's English estate, to which the English people gave the name of Domesday.

Væ victis!
 "Woe to
 the van-
 quished!"

Yet the miseries inflicted by formal process under his "stark" will were but small, compared with the sufferings of the vanquished people under arbitrary tyrannies. Lawful rights of the peasantry, which the captain of the invaders would have maintained, were trampled down by intruded lords and their successors. For a long time, the lords, by their private jurisdictions and by clandestine cruelties, could set the king's law at defiance, and were a law to themselves. The worst sufferings of the village folk, during the century and more after the Conquest, were the arbitrary misdeeds of the lords.

The first three Norman kings were able to put some restraint upon overbearing masters. If the lords were despots to their serfs, the king was a despot to them. Yet even in those reigns encroachment never ceased, and there can be no doubt that horrors were perpetrated in castle dungeons which never reached the light of day.

In the reign of Stephen, the antagonism of the

Horrors of
oppression.

racess attained its climax. The hatred of suspicious masters vented itself with savage ferocity upon the subject people, still obstinate in resistance or sullen and dangerous in submission. The English were accused of a conspiracy to murder all the Frenchmen in the land upon one day. During the horrors which ensued the royal power was in abeyance, under the disputed claim to the crown. Every lord did what he would, and new lords, intruded by violence, were worse than the first. The country was dominated by castles, built, no doubt, most of them, for self-defence. Lords had to protect their homes from foreign mercenaries: villagers sought refuge in the woods.

But, whatever their first purpose, the castles dominated the country around, and were made strongholds of tyranny and rapine. They were all "dens of thieves" to the villagers. The whole country stood in fear of them. One writer of the time asserts that every third village had its castle. Another, more exact, or affecting to be, numbers them at 1115. The English Chronicle, that concise and precious record of the centuries before, dies out in a wail of horror over the deeds perpetrated in the castles.

Described
by the
English
Chronicle.

"Every powerful man," it relates, "built his castles, and they filled the land full of castles. They heavily afflicted the poor men of the land with castle-building; and when the castles were

built, they filled them with devils and evil men. Then, both by night and day, they took the men they supposed to possess any goods, country men and women, and threw them into prison, to obtain their gold and silver, and tortured them with unutterable tortures, for never were martyrs tortured as they were. Some they hanged up by the feet, and smoked them with foul smoke ; some they hanged by the thumbs ; others by the head, and hung burning things on their feet. To some they put knotted cords about their heads, and writhed them till they went to the brain. Some they thrust into dungeons, wherein were adders and snakes, and so they tormented them. Some they thrust into a chest, short, narrow and shallow, and put sharp stones therein, and crushed them inside it, till they broke all their limbs. Many of the castles had strange cruel things, called 'rachenteges.' It was a weight as much as two or three men could lift ; the victim was fastened to a post, and they put a sharp iron collar about his throat and neck, in such manner that he could neither sit nor lie down to sleep, but he bore all the weight. Many thousands they tortured with hunger. . . .

"They were constantly levying tribute on the towns; and they called it 'Tenserie'; and when the wretched men had no more to give, they destroyed and burnt the towns ; and well might you travel

all day, and never find a man settled in a town, or land cultivated. So that corn was dear; of flesh and cheese and butter, none was there in the land.

“Wretched men starved of hunger. Some went about begging who formerly had been rich men. Some fled the country. Never was greater wretchedness in the land, and never did the heathen men cause worse ills than these did.

“At last they spared not even the church or churchyard, but took whatever valuable was therein, and burnt the church and all they left in it. If two or three horsemen came near a town, all the townsmen fled, thinking them to be spoilers.

“It was ploughing the sea; for the land bore no corn; it was all foredone by such deeds, and men openly said that Christ and His saints were asleep.”

Such is the dying song of the English Chronicle. So ends the history of the old English people, written in their old English tongue. The old, pure race of Angles and Saxons, the men of fair skin, and blue eyes, and golden hair—the angels of Pope Gregory—had perished with the houses of the nobles. In land-hunger, and greed of gain, and thirst for power, they had spent their centuries since they came to England, eating up the smaller men of their own race; and they were now caten

up more thoroughly themselves. The old England comes to an end under the Norman kings. The new England, that is to be, we here find in its condition of chaos, "without form and void." Our short history is that of the man through whom God breathed into it its first "breath of life."

Its condition of chaos! Famine and pestilence came in the wake of savage war and inhuman dungeon barbarities. By rapine and violence the land was brought to desolation. Men died in heaps, or ate greedily the flesh of dogs and horses and the garbage of raw herbs and roots. Villages were left without inhabitants; fields were uncultivated, or were white to harvest, where no man was left to gather it.

Amidst the general desolation there remained one singular exception; not certainly to all the sufferings of the country, but to this extremity of suffering and degradation, and to the base spirit of servitude engendered by it.

That exception was the city of London. Some knowledge of the great city, as it was already regarded, is both interesting in itself and useful for our purpose; and fortunately we possess contemporary accounts of it, one especially, with considerable details, from a writer of credit, to whom, both here and otherwise, we shall be much indebted—William Fitz-Stephen, a well-informed and fair biographer of Thomas Becket, his fellow-

London in
Stephen's
"reign."

citizen of London, his companion, and his secretary or chaplain through life.

London was already a great and prosperous place of commerce, and was the resort or ordinary abode of men of rank who took no part in its trade.

The first Norman, having plundered the city, after his manner ; having, in the early days of his conquest, carried off what he could of its gold and silver and precious chattels ; having bridled it with his Tower ; and, as in other places, confiscated a large portion of its ground and buildings, and bestowed them upon some of his hiring adventurers, who became " the barons of the city ;" * and, taking no part in trade themselves, lived at their ease upon rents exacted from traders, for the use of buildings which had been their own ;—the Conqueror, having wrought his will upon the people of London and their accumulated wealth, was wise enough to see that it would be bad policy and against his own interest to check the growth of fresh wealth. He therefore re-established and confirmed the liberties and privileges of the city. His son, Henry, ratified and extended them by a charter, which makes mention of the religious houses, the barons, and the citizens. They are empowered to

* This is stated with reserve, as what appears to be the most likely inference from all we know of " the barons of the city." They are sometimes identified with the aldermen ; and this may be a true view, without making the other false.

hold the county of Middlesex, or the king's domain in it, in farm for ever, at a rent of £300 a year. They are to appoint their own sheriff and justiciar, and to be under the jurisdiction of no other justiciar. They are exempted from various tolls and dues over all England, and in all seaports. The rights and privileges of their courts are maintained. Claims of debts by citizens are to be paid or answered within the city, where their husting sits every Monday. Among other provisions the document reserves to the citizens their rights of chase in Chiltern, Middlesex, and Surrey.

Our picture of the inner life of London is from Fitz-Stephen.*

"London," he says, in a curious jumble of its advantages, "is fortunate in its healthy air, its Christian religion, the strength of its fortifications, the natural advantages of its situation, the honour of its citizens, the chastity of its matrons, delightful for its games, fertile in noble men."

In his exposition of these several heads, he informs us that, besides the cathedral of St. Paul's, the city possesses thirteen great conventual churches and a hundred and twenty-six lesser churches. It has three privileged and ancient schools, besides many other schools, in all of which great attention is paid to the art of speaking.

The Tower, on the east, is a very large and

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 2-18; Robertson, vol. iii.

strong fortification, with lofty walls springing from a deep ditch. A high turreted wall, with seven double gates, surrounds the city to the north, running from the Tower to two strong forts on the west. A similar wall ran along the south of the city, but was undermined by the river and has fallen.

Westminster Palace, an incomparable edifice, two miles from the city, stands up above the river, with surrounding walls and forts. It is joined to the city by a suburb of many houses, surrounded by spacious and beautiful gardens and trees.

To the north of the city are pleasant fields, and streams merry with the sound of mill-wheels. Beyond is a great forest abounding in deer, boars, and wild bulls. The citizens' rights of chase extend over Middlesex, Hertford, Chiltern, and in Kent as far as Cray.

On the Strand is a public cook-shop, daily provided with meats for rich and poor. Wines are sold in cellars, and in ships on the river. The commerce of the city is with every nation under heaven.

Every Friday there is a horse-fair in Smooth-field (afterwards corrupted into Smithfield), a field close without one of the gates, which takes its name from its level surface. There are departments of the fair for pigs, cows, sheep, and agricultural implements.

The city is under the government of its own yearly sheriffs, aldermen, and lesser magistrates, and has its various court-houses, where courts are held on certain days.

No city has more admirable customs of worship and festivity, or institutions for charity and hospitality. The chief troubles of the place arise from the drunkenness of foolish people and from frequent fires.

Hither resort the bishops, abbots, and nobles of the realm, at the summons of the king or the metropolitan, and reside in their own houses as citizens.

The writer dwells, with manifest delight, on the various sports of the merry people. They have theatrical passion-plays, representing the deeds of the martyrs. The boys take fighting-cocks to school on Shrove Tuesday, and the morning is spent in fighting them. After dinner they go out and play at ball in the fields, and the rich elders come on horseback to look on. On the Sundays in Lent there is tilting; the sons of citizens and nobles and of bishop's families go out on horse, with lance and shield. In the Easter holidays there is tilting on the river. A youth, standing at the poop of a boat pulled by oarsmen, would strike with spear at a shield fixed upright upon a pole in the river. His object was to break the spear-shaft, and keep himself in the boat. If he failed to break

C

it he was thrown into the water, amid the laughter of the spectators.

In the summer, the favourite games are archery, running, leaping, stone-throwing, and others, with moonlight dances; in the winter, bull and bear-baiting, and sports on the ice, with skates made from tibia-bones.

London
after dark.

We have also, belonging to the same age, some accounts of London after dark, which, as in other times, are less pleasant than those by day, and show that the city was not altogether free from the general disorder. The dim night view discovers it subject to depredations by gangs of thieves, sometimes large enough to come under the old English law as armies, and with men of the higher classes for their leaders.

Bands of men, as many as a hundred or more, men of families accounted noble, would turn out at night and break into houses, or rob and murder passengers. The streets were dangerous after daylight.* In 1174, a gang of ruffians broke into a house through the stone wall. The owner, forewarned, or having friends within, gave the burglars a warm reception. One of their leaders was wounded and taken, and, to save himself, informed of the others. They were all of the families of noble citizens. The leader, put to the ordeal by water, failed to clear himself by that dubious

* Benedict, i, 155.

method of trial. He then offered the king a large sum of money for his life—an evidence that such offers were accepted. Henry II., although greedy enough of money, refused the offer and hanged the burglar.

The city was able to supply to Stephen a force of twenty thousand horse and sixty thousand foot, including, no doubt, mercenaries from without. It was principally to the Londoners that he owed his election to the throne over the head of Matilda the empress. They cared not that her father Henry, with imperious will and “a voice of thunder,” as we learn from a writer of that age, had commanded the lords of the land, assembled in Great Council, to take their oaths to Matilda as his successor. Stephen had been the first to swear. That the oath was compulsory, was perhaps the excuse of others, besides himself, for breaking it.

After the battle called “the Fair of Lincoln,” when he fell into Matilda’s hands, and was sent a prisoner to Bristol Castle, the empress-queen came raging to London, receiving on her way the submission of people of all classes. Nobles who had stood with Stephen came offering their allegiance, and were coldly received, repulsed with threats, or driven off with reproaches. Her haughty conduct offended her best friends. Arrived at London, she sent for some of the richest citizens, and demanded an immense fine and immediate payment. They

Armed
power of
the city

1141.

The
Empress
Matilda at
London.

implored her clemency, or, at least, time. Her wrath was violent. "They had not spared their money for her injury. Let them see to it, and bring instantly the sum demanded."

Her flight.

Fortunately for the citizens, while she was expecting their return with the money, Stephen's queen, a woman of energy and resource, was seen with a body of troops burning their lands on the south of the river. Quick in decision, they made common cause with her. The empress was sitting down to dinner, when she heard a clatter of bells and a rushing tumult, and was told that her house would be immediately attacked. She fled at a gallop, and was hardly off when a mob burst into her quarters, ate up her dinner, and pillaged her baggage, which was all left behind.

The numerous and well-armed forces of London have conspicuous mention at "the Rout of Winchester," and in other actions of the war ; till at last, more through the exhaustion of all parties than their inclination, the strife was brought to an end. There were still among the leaders of it men who hated peace, because they lived by rapine, who would have prolonged the war without end. Some, it was said, after the brilliant success of Matilda's son Henry, in the capture of Malmesbury Castle and the relief of Wallingford, wished for a temporary peace, fearing that his decisive success would give them a master.

But the country generally, from lords to serfs, ^{1153.}
weary of strife and worn out with suffering, longed ^{Treaty of}
for peace on any terms, and accepted gladly the ^{Wallingford.}
treaty of Wallingford, negotiated under the advice
of Archbishop Theobald. By this agreement
Stephen was to reign for life, and Henry of Anjou,
Matilda's son by her second husband, to succeed
him.

CHAPTER II.

RISE OF THOMAS BECKET.

King
Stephen
demanding
the corona-
tion of his
son.

Is opposed
by Arch-
bishop
Theobald.

THE treaty of Wallingford was made possible by the death of Stephen's son, Eustace. Some time before he died, his father, under a better turn of fortune, had made an effort to secure his succession by having him crowned during his own lifetime. His coronation would have gained him much support, both from formal churchmanship and from religious feeling. But there was a difficulty. Theobald, the Archbishop of Canterbury, refused to crown the son while the father lived. All his suffragan bishops supported him. Stephen got them into his custody, and shut them up all in one house to teach them obedience.* Kings and dukes had, in times recent, given sharp lessons, sometimes savagely severe, to refractory ecclesiastics; and the bishops were probably thinking of them, and of their own danger, when their archbishop managed to escape by boat, crossed the

* "Gervase of Canterbury," vol. i. p. 150.

river, and put the sea between himself and the king.

Stephen was baffled. A coronation by the bishops, against the prohibition of the primate, would have been worse than futile. And his own position was not strong enough for a prolonged quarrel with the head of the Church in England. It was not long, therefore, before a solution of the difficulty was agreed upon.

“The coronation of a king’s son during his father’s lifetime was a religious service without precedent, and could not properly take place but under the special sanction of the pope.”

Such was the matured decision of the archbishop, and he sent his envoys to Rome ostensibly (and what the king may have expected) to obtain the pope’s sanction to the desired rite ; really, it would appear, in quest of an “apostolic” prohibition of it. Theobald certainly wished to avoid a step which could only prolong the public miseries.

Of this embassy the governing mind was a secretary of the archbishop,* a man high in his favour and confidence, who had been known in London for some years, and stood well in the eyes of the people, especially of the English inhabitants. That man has come down to us by the name of Thomas à Becket, but was known also, in his own time, as he would be known now, as Thomas Becket.

First appearance of Becket in mission to Rome.

* “Gervase of Canterbury,” vol. i. p. 150.

A native of
London.

He was born in London, in one of the houses bordering on the Chepe, in or near the year 1117. His father, Gilbert, was of a family sprung from Rouen ; his mother, Matilda, was reputed to be of a family from Caen. There is some reason, however, for believing that he had English blood in his veins on one or both sides. We have his own word for it * that his ancestors, for some generations, had been citizens of London. From his own time there have been those who have claimed him for an Englishman. But we shall see there were other reasons for this, besides the unquestioned fact that he was born in London.

Gilbert, the father, was a baron of the city, not of great wealth, but independent of trade. He had served the office of portreeve, or sheriff, at that time the highest magistrate ; but became reduced in circumstances through accidental losses, arising principally, it appears, from the fires which were so frequent. According to one account, his means became so far crippled as to interfere with the education of his son, who, although well versed in the learning of the age, was never accounted among its foremost scholars.

The boy
Becket.

Thomas received his early education partly in the London schools, partly at Merton, in Surrey, at the famous monastery of the Augustine canons.

* Letter ccxiv. The numbers of the letters referred to are Robertson's.

In London, he must often have taken part in the public sports of which we have heard, for he obtained a fame of his own, very early in life, for his love of fair play, and his intense hatred of overbearing arrogance. He was particularly noticed, as a boy, for his love of fair dealing and his open aversion to foul play and wrong, especially when shown under assumptions of arrogant and factitious superiority.* His character.

Our evidence of these facts is all the more convincing, because it comes to us from biographers whose purpose in writing was to celebrate him as a saint of the Church. In his boyhood and early life, they have nothing to say of his churchmanship. They tell us what he was observed to be in himself, and their accounts of him bear the clear marks of truthfulness.

A youth of his temperament, and not afraid to show it, was sure to be known in the public sports of boys, French and English, under the eyes of onlookers of both the nations. To stand by the weak against the bully, would mostly be to take the part of the English boy against the French. We can easily understand how Becket, if not English by extraction, would be sure by such conduct to bring upon himself, with the French class, the name of Englishman for a nickname; with the other, to gain that sympathy of English-

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 7.

men which made them claim him for one of themselves.

But, what is more to our purpose, his boyish love of fair play and hatred of overbearing arrogance show that a strong feeling for justice and liberty was in his nature ; they were characteristics of the boy, and we shall find they were ruling motives with him through life.

His visit to
Pevensey.

During his school-vacations he was sometimes the guest of a noble knight, a friend of his father, known as Richer de l'Aigle.* The name occurs among those of thirty-eight principal lords, who, years afterwards, attested the proceedings of the notorious Council of Clarendon. He was also the owner of the majestic castle of Pevensey. Thomas is said to have visited him there ; and the famous scenes around could hardly fail to stir a mind like his to thoughts upon the past history of the country, in the future of which, to all time, he was himself to bear so illustrious a name. He would look down from the Norman towers, on one side, upon the great castle-garth within the massive Roman walls, which still surround it to some feet of height. That grassy area, bare and empty, from century to century, as it is now, was the site of the Roman-British city of Anderida, stormed and sacked, six centuries before, by keel-borne Englishmen, who slew the people of the place, "till not one Brit was left alive."

* Grim, c. 8.

On the other side might be seen the mud hovels of English labourers, who were suffering, under Norman lords, some of the hardships inflicted by their fathers upon the people before them. There was scope for a mind that hated wrong.

In front of him was the landing-place of the Norman invaders ; and, a few miles off, almost in sight, the memorable hill above Hastings, with its great Abbey of Battle, the victor's memorial of the fatal fight.

Becket was continuing his studies at Paris, and was about twenty-two, when his mother died ; and his father's straitened circumstances, and death soon after, obliged him to return to London, and find means of supporting himself. He was employed for three years as clerk of accounts to a wealthy citizen, Osbern Eightpenny, a relation of his family, and had opportunity of gaining a knowledge of business-affairs in the office of a portreeve. Osbern either held the office himself, or, more likely, was their official, in a capacity something like that of an under-sheriff.

A city clerk.

About
1140.

He was found thus employed by two civilians of Bologna—Archdeacon Baldwin and Master Eustace—who had been invited to England by the Archbishop, to assist him in establishing a school of the Civil Law, which had lately come into vogue in the schools of Italy. They had formerly been the guests of Gilbert Becket in the Chepe, and

In the service of
Archbishop
Theobald.

knew enough of his son to wish to introduce him to Theobald, with their recommendation to his service. He went with them to Harrow, where Theobald was residing upon his manor.

The family of the Becketts had already been known to the Archbishop, both in England and Normandy; and Thomas had qualities likely to recommend him to a patron. He was admitted to Theobald's household, and quickly gained his confidence and friendship. It was the beginning of his greatness. In those days, the household of the archbishop equalled the king's in grandeur, and surpassed it as a training school of learning and intellect.

It was not unnatural that his favour with his patron, and his rapid promotion, excited the envy of elder dependents; and Thomas appears, for a time, to have suffered more than ordinary persecution. Roger Pont l'Évêque, his antagonist in after-years, as Archbishop of York, is mentioned among his adversaries at this time. Besides the rising favour of Becket, they were two men who could hardly associate without feelings of antagonism. So much may be assumed, without taking account of the hideous crimes in Roger's public reputation.*

He gains his confidence.

Theobald was not long in discovering that Thomas was wise in counsel, skilful in diplomacy,

* *v.* John of Salisbury, in letter dclxxvii.

strenuous in business, and zealous for his master, in whatever service he might be employed. His friendship and confidence increased, till he made him his confidential secretary, and employed him in the important mission to Rome in which we found him.

For such services it was necessary to have an income. It was a custom of the time for public servants to be provided with incomes from Church benefices, and to bear the expenses of missions and public services at their own cost. Becket therefore took minor orders, with no intention to discharge any clerical duties, but to be able to hold Church preferments, of which the duties, as the custom was, would be discharged by deputies. His large preferments.

His first preferment was the church of Mary-le-Strand, given him by the Bishop of Worcester. He was then presented to the living of Otford by the Archbishop. Soon after, he obtained a prebend of St. Paul's, and another of Lincoln. Within the year of King Stephen's death, Roger Pont l'Évêque was preferred to be Archbishop of York, and Thomas of London, as he was now called, after qualifying himself with deacon's orders, was endowed with his vacated Archdeaconry of Canterbury,—a preferment accounted as, after the bishoprics and mitred abbacies, the most valuable in the Church. It was worth £100 a year—not less than £1500 or £2000 of our money. The provostship 1154.

of Beverley was another addition to his load of benefices.

This rapid accumulation of churches and dignities is the best evidence of the value in which he was held as a public servant. Of the modern feeling about pluralities he knew nothing. Every fresh preferment was only another addition to the income necessary to his position and its duties. If his benefices were many, it was commonly reported that he might have had far more, and that no patron could refuse him.

He was thus a wealthy churchman and statesman before he went on this mission to Rome.

The papacy
a great
power.

The traditionary character of Becket, as a champion of the papacy, may suggest, perhaps, to some readers of this transaction, that he was already scheming in its interests. Visibly, there is no ground for suspicion that any thought of the position or powers of the pope, except as a recognized judge of appeal, ever entered his head. His purpose was his master's, and it was one of State policy. The pope could advance it, and they appealed to him.

The papacy was an ancient and established power, and was universally acknowledged. It was a great world-power, whether it was more than that or not; and in this age it was towering to its height. Kings and people bowed down to it. The great emperor, Frederic Barbarossa, had

lately held the stirrup for Adrian IV. ; although, being inexperienced, as he said, in that sort of service, he held it on the wrong side. More sincerely, Lewis and Henry, the kings of France and England, were seen, on one occasion, walking on each side of Adrian's successor, Alexander III., holding the reins of his bridle.

King Lewis always addressed the pope as his lord ; and "lord," in those days, had a meaning. Acknowledged by kings. King Stephen had saluted him, in his letters, as "lord and sweetest father," with "health and obedience." John of England and his successors, or some of them, for three centuries acknowledged the papal lordship in a sense not intended by either Stephen or Lewis.*

A century later, and we find Edward I., one of the greater English kings, addressing Gregory X. as "father and lord and supreme pontiff of the Holy Roman Church and of the Church universal, with all reverence and honour, and with devout kisses of his blessed feet."

The "Kisses of the holy feet" became the customary salutation of "the apostolic man," as he was called in all seriousness.

It is true there were already signs of coming contention between popes and kings, and between popes and peoples.

The persistent and ever-advancing encroachments

* Rymer, *passim*.

of the papacy were provoking kings to retaliation and reprisals. The long struggle had commenced between pope and king, to be revived, from time to time, during centuries following ; having for its aim, on both sides, to gather into one all the powers of both.

Hildebrand, Pope Gregory VII. a century before this, had contended, almost on equal terms, with the emperor. In the middle of this twelfth century, we find Adrian IV. in hot contention with Barbarossa. Adrian IV. began life a poor English lad, the son of a priest of slender means who became a monk of St. Albans. It is well known that he is the only Englishman in the line of popes, and his accession to the lofty throne, which looked down upon the thrones of kings, was an event which the people of England, French and English, lords and villagers, had cause to take heed to ; and there are evidences that they did.

Adrian died, after a short pontificate, almost at open war with the emperor, leaving behind him to his successor, Alexander, both the war and an emperor's antipope.

Beginnings
of religious
freedom.

When the kings were striking their first blows for independence of Italian masters, the peoples also were beginning to reclaim their birthright as reasonable beings—the right to the free use of their own intellects.

There was a ferment among Church rulers upon

the appearance, in Stephen's reign, of a sect of people * who held and preached, or were supposed to hold, opinions at variance with the ecclesiastical system which ruled the Western world, with the name and credit of Christianity.

The real sin of these "heretics" was one to be suppressed at whatever cost. Their conduct, and, no doubt, their preaching, challenged the authority of the Bishop of Rome. It was a heresy which went on spreading after it had appeared to be extinguished in blood.

Not many years after its suppression at Toulouse, in the reign of Henry II., a company of "heretics" from Germany, men and women, thirty in number, were heard of preaching their doctrines in England. Whether they were of the "Albigenses," or the "Cathari," or other sect of Church history, appears to be doubtful, and is not very material. It was questioned whether they made a single convert. One of the writers here referred to affirms that they made one, who deserted them when they got into trouble. They were taken into custody, and, by the king's orders, were brought before a council of bishops at Oxford, where they were questioned on what were deemed to be primary articles of the Christian faith. When "heretics" acted with independence of ruling powers, it was always easy to find them in error upon matters of "faith." 1166.

* William of Newburgh, i. 133; "Ypod. Neustriæ," p. 194.

They were branded and whipped, and turned into the open country, in winter, stripped to the waist. Any one giving them relief was to be subjected to the same punishment. They perished of cold and hunger.

Whether these sufferers for their opinions had anything true to say or not, it is clear that the people were sorely in need of teachers.

The Church of Rome had ruled over the minds and consciences of Englishmen for well-nigh three-fourths of a thousand years, and, at the end of that period, every record we possess, taking them in any order of reading, aggravates, one above another, the dark shades of a society under no government of either Christian principle or natural morals.

General
corruption
of society.

In the age we are looking back to, the moral aspect of society was hideous. We will take the picture of it from the pencil of a man who lived in the midst of what he saw and drew, and was competent to draw it.*

"Rarely," he says, "could you find one who lived justly and piously and without vice. Men are now so eager to do ill, that it is thought a crime to be inexperienced in crime. Not only secular people are enslaved to their evil ways, but prelates of the Church, in bonds to gluttony and covetousness, make sale of justice, rob the poor of

* Gervase of Canterbury, i. 17.

their bread and give it to buffoons, harass their dependents, whom they ought to cherish, and, casting behind them the sweetness of God, find their pleasure in worldly desires or rather miseries."

If the kings of England in the twelfth century had cause to take their stand against papal encroachment upon their authority, the people had no less cause to question the pope's authority over their consciences.

Popular resistance to established forms of religion was, in England, for a long time yet, but rare and feeble. It is true that, in the worst of times, there were priests and monks, and here and there a bishop, who, powerless against prevailing evils, and knowing no gospel of deliverance from them, yet preached to the poor the gospel of consolation. In the horrors of the anarchy, groups of peasants, bowed down under oppressions, would gather in the solitude of the woods to hear the tidings of a life to come, when all their sorrows would be past.

The mass of the people stood in awe of Rome and its rulers. Their powers were imagined to reach beyond the grave. They held the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Consequently their excommunication was terrible, not only for the life to come, but for the life present. The accursed man was an outcast from society: he was avoided as a leper; to associate with him was to be im-

Religion not extinct.

Superstitious terror of Rome.

plicated in his curse. We shall come upon instances of persons who pretended to make light of Church censures, and, when the king encouraged them, were not afraid of showing it. Yet even in these cases a concealed fear often breaks out. To be declared an outcast from the Church by solemn sentence was a terror to king and peasant; and an interdict upon the land, prohibiting religious rites and services, was a terror to all.

Kings and people were slowly awakening from the spell of superstition which had held them fast for ages. But, for a long time yet, they were to writhe and turn, and turn in vain, against foreign masters, calling themselves successors of the apostles of Jesus Christ, with a system of teaching essentially the very opposite of theirs in its first principles, and in its lasting results to mankind.

Roman pre-
dominance
on the
advance.

Kings, with their statesmen, contended against the foreign yoke. They protested, they resisted, they threatened to throw it off. But the Italian masters had the advantage. For two centuries yet, and longer, before their power began to wane, their grasp of England was tightened; till, with audacious effrontery of rapacity, they held all the best preferments of its Church for the endowment of pope's creatures, foreign prelates and cardinals, mostly Italians, who never crossed the Channel.

What might be the opinions of Archbishop

Theobald concerning papal powers and pretensions when he sent his secretary to Rome, is a question which does not here concern us. We have to do with the secretary himself; and his opinions and intentions are to be unfolded upon the consideration of his whole life. We have nothing as yet to show that he had any purpose in his mission to "the threshold of the Apostles," as it was often called, other than the political purpose for which he was sent, and to gain the influence of "the apostolic man" in its support.

Becket's mission political.

It appears that he went more than once to Rome, and had other delicate questions to manage, besides that of the coronation of Eustace. But the accounts are scanty and imperfect. In the intervals of his missions, he spent a year at Bologna, and some time at Auxerre, in the study of the civil law. There can be no doubt that he gained the esteem of ruling men at Rome who acted with him. He was a man to command respect.

He gains esteem at Rome.

Of tall figure (over six feet), with an imposing countenance that showed strength of character in its massive jaw, and delicacy of perception in the moving curves of an expressive mouth, and both strength and delicacy in its finely cut, well-developed, slightly aquiline nose; looking out, under massive eyebrows and a broad intellectual forehead, from large, bright, dark eyes, fascinating

His personal influence.

in their ordinary quiet expression, and, under the glow of emotion, fascinating to subdue ; a man of cheerful temperament, abundant intellectual resource, and speech ready and eloquent ; entering heart and soul into everything he undertook ;—his most remarkable power through life was his personal influence. No man, we are told, unless he was a prejudiced enemy, could converse with him and not fall under it, as fascinated.

Whatever may have been his secret instructions, there can be no doubt that he brought back from Rome precisely the decision which Theobald desired. And he got the credit, there and in England, both of the diplomatic skill which gained the decision * looked for, and of the wise policy which suggested the appeal.

The pope's decision smoothed the way for the accession of the house of Anjou. A service so valuable to the coming king could not fail to have its influence upon the future career of the guiding envoy.

* Gervase, i. 150.

CHAPTER III.

HENRY OF ANJOU.

THOMAS had been twelve years in the service of 1154.
the archbishop, and was about thirty-seven years
of age, when King Stephen died. Henry of
Anjou, now a young man of twenty-one, was
crowned King of England on the Sunday before
Christmas, 1154. Thomas the archdeacon passed Becket in
the king's
service.
immediately into his service from that of the
archbishop, and within a few weeks became his
chancellor. He was indebted to the influence of
Archbishop Theobald and Bishop Henry of
Winchester, Stephen's brother; both of them
sufficiently acquainted with the young king's
character to see the expediency of having about
him a person of Becket's prudence and sagacity,
and most likely they also thought of his stead-
fastness as a Churchman. Henry himself could not
be ignorant either of Thomas's great talents or of
his services during the late reign.

His transference to the king's service was

effected without difficulty. It was alleged in subsequent times of trouble, and was made a reproach against him, that he paid the king money for the office of chancellor. It is not improbable. Offices in the royal service or household, and any office that brought money to the tenant of it, were seldom bestowed by the hungry kings without their being paid for it. It was believed by some that the chancellorship was an exception, and was not sold; but the records of the time have evidence to the contrary. Henry certainly was not less greedy of money than the kings before and after him.

His experience of life.

Up to this time, Becket, although he had been employed with honour abroad, had taken no part in public affairs at home. But his life's experience had been eventful! He must have heard of the compulsory oath of the barons to the Empress Matilda when he was a boy at school. He saw most likely the entry of Stephen into the city, amid the acclamations and shouts of fidelity, which the Londoners kept so well. He was in Osbern's office when Matilda made her incursion to London, to be so ignominiously chased away. Many a tale was told him of the horrors of the castles and the desolation of the civil war and anarchy. It was a youthful experience of men and things, to tell for something upon any mind that was a mind at all, and could not fail to have

influence upon the life's future of such a mind as his.

King Henry came to the throne under circumstances favourable to its stability and to his personal power. The terrible sufferings of the years of disorder had driven all classes of the community into an intense longing for peace, under the rule of one master. The dominion of many lords had been found intolerable; all were eager for what, in the condition to which the country was brought, was the only remedy—the rule of one man, and willing, for their relief and security, to allow him unwonted powers. The Norman kings had been masters; barons and people were now ready for any tyrant, and they found in Henry of Anjou a man fitted both by birth and temperament to play the tyrant.

The nation
weary of
disorder.

The child of lines of tyrants on both sides, it would have been a marvel if he had been anything else himself. What his mother and her fathers were is plain enough in English history to a reader careful of simple facts in the dilutions of various styles of narration. His father, Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, spoken of by a modern writer* as a prince of discretion and judgment, is marked with infamy by the shouts of rabble courtiers in one of the exciting scenes of the life of Becket. A biographer explains the allusion, and makes

Welcomes
a king "of
tyrants'
blood."

* Lord Lyttelton.

Earl
Geoffrey's
charger.

him infamous to all time for his foul and abominable ferocity to the chapter of Séz and their bishop, whom they had elected without waiting for his license. He took his vengeance upon them all in a hideous parody of the dish of Herod with the Baptist's head.*

Reputation
of the
Angevin
family.

The blood of the Angevin counts had a notoriety in popular story as reputed to be mingled with demon's blood. Some of the family made a boast of the myth. Richard, the son of Henry, took delight in recounting to his companions in the Crusade, the strange tale of the same Geoffrey's grandmother. She could never be induced to enter a church, till, at last compelled against her will, she disappeared during the Mass in a sulphureous thunderstorm, and was seen no more.

It was impossible that the son of Geoffrey and Matilda could have derived from them or their ancestors any idea of his relations with England higher than those of the Normans before him—that the island kingdom, won upon the hills above Hastings, inherited by him from his grandfather, and secured by treaty with Stephen, was his own personal possession ; its lands, his estate for money and hunting forests ; its people, his servants ; and the best servants, they who could extract the most money out of it.

* Fitz-Stephen, c. lv. But perhaps it was Henry's grandfather ;
v. Becket, quoted by Grinn, c. 35.

Descending from his ancestors to himself, we find copious evidence as to what manner of man he was. He makes himself prominent in the events of his time; and we must know him to understand the great controversy of his reign. To form a judgment of Becket, we must know something of the king he resisted. It is hardly fair to speak of one of the antagonists as "insincere" and "unchristian," as some late writers * have done, and then to tell us that the motives and character of the other are not to be judged by us, but "left to a Higher Tribunal."† We have ample materials for understanding both the motives and the conduct of both the men. They ought not to be left, with reverence be it said, to the Higher Tribunal. They are to be studied here, and related impartially for our instruction and for the amendment of things here in this world.

Henry of Anjou.

Henry had already in the transactions of his early life shown himself the man he was to continue to the end. To what expedients he was capable of having recourse, to what depths of self-abasement he could descend, in quest of his own interests was already open to the world. They were such as might well suggest to Theobald that somebody should be placed by his side with strength and prudence to restrain and guide him.

His premature self-seeking.

* Dean Hook and Bishop Stubbs among others.

† Stubbs.

Young as he was, he had already doomed himself and his family, and with them unknown numbers of people, to incalculable misfortunes.

His
inherited
dominions.

He inherited the kingdom of England and the dukedom of Normandy from his mother, and he claimed and got the county of Anjou as by inheritance from his father. But his father had devised by will that Henry should succeed to his mother's territories, and his next son, Geoffrey, to his own. Before he died, he put Geoffrey in possession of three strong places; and upon his death-bed, foreseeing, it would appear, the ambitious projects of his eldest son, he bound his bishops and nobles under oath not to bury his body till Henry should have solemnly sworn to give effect to his last will.

1156.
His conduct
to his brother
Geoffrey.

Henry, arriving after his father's death, took the oath, buried his dead, and broke it. He seized upon Anjou, expelled his brother from his castles, and left him a private estate to live upon.

1158.

Geoffrey was in trouble under this harsh treachery, when he heard that the free city of Nantes had asked him to be their lord and ruler. He accepted the offer, and died soon after. Henry immediately claimed and took the city of Nantes as his heir.

He had already obtained by his marriage the duchy of Aquitaine, and with it all the provinces from Auvergne to the sea, and from the Loire to the Pyrenees. The dukedom of Brittany was

under feudal subjection to him as Duke of Normandy, and he managed before long to bring the feudal dukedom under his authority by the marriage of one of his infant sons. He was thus master of all Western France from Flanders to the Pyrenees.

But to obtain the duchy of Aquitaine and the provinces united with it he had begun life by selling himself in a way degrading for ever to any man. It was in marriage certainly; and prudent marriages are common enough, and are seldom hardly judged. But this marriage was quite out of ordinary rule among civilized people of any time; and its fruits were deadly, for a generation and more to follow, to people of many countries.

The great inheritance of Aquitaine, including all Western France south of the Loire, had fallen to an heiress, Eleanor by name. Lewis, the King of France, married Eleanor and her provinces when Henry was a child five years old. A strait-laced morality might be out of place in a narrative of the conduct of a fair daughter of Languedoc, as Eleanor was; but the wives of kings were even in those days expected to be decent, and Eleanor trespassed the limits tolerable in any condition. It did not mitigate her guilt that it broke into flagrant notoriety when she was playing the heroine in one of the expeditions of the Crusades for the relief of the city of Jerusalem.

His
marriage.

Eleanor of
Aquitaine.

She had taken the cross along with her husband ; and she sent spindles for presents to recreant knights who were slow to follow their example. She went with the expedition, called the Second Crusade, at the head of a gay troop of mounted Amazons. Their exploits belong to the tales of the Crusades, where we find this expedition notorious for looseness of morals. The ladies did not assist the military operations ; they much impeded them, and were principally to blame for the bloody defeat of Laodicæa.

The exploits of Queen Eleanor became notorious. She disgraced herself and her royal husband by scandalous amours, both with Christians and with infidels. And to tell so much, is not to tell the worst of what is written in the contemporary annals.

Her conduct after her return to Paris was not less scandalous and notorious. Both Henry of Anjou and his father Geoffrey were set down in popular rumour as among her admirers. Yet Lewis would have avoided a divorce if possible. They had only daughters, and the great inheritance of Aquitaine might be lost. But a divorce became inevitable. Eleanor was allowed to sue for it on a pretext of consanguinity (they were distant cousins), and was not opposed. There must have been urgent cause, and some of the accounts supply one. They tell us, and it is not

Her divorce.

incredible and not without confirmation of indirect evidence, not only, what is not in doubt, that six weeks after her divorce from Lewis she married Henry, but also that three months later she had a son, whom Lewis must have repudiated. Henry acknowledged him, and called him William. If this account be true, it was fortunate for himself and for many people besides that he did not survive his years of infancy. But other chroniclers put the birth of William a year later.* 1152.

The military and naval forces of Aquitaine were of essential service to Henry in his expedition to England the next year. Aquitaine was then a great naval power. If he sold himself, it was for a high price. Only it turned out that he gave more than he took account of; for this marriage with such a woman, thirteen years older than himself, was fruitful in sorrows both to him and to many people who had the misfortune to be his subjects. The marriage immediately convenient. Ultimately disastrous.

Henry's wars with his sons were the principal events of his later years. Towns were burnt, countries laid waste, thousands of people massacred in the wretched quarrels; and sympathy with the unhappy father of unnatural children is the stock

* Lord Lyttelton, in his *Life of Henry II.*, stumbles between the stories. He puts the marriage correctly in 1152, and the birth of William in 1153; but he afterwards tells us that he was three years old at Easter, 1155. As regards Eleanor, the question is a small one; what she was hangs in no doubt.

feeling of the tale. But what sort of sons were to be expected of such a marriage? The transactions are scandalous; but they are scandals of public conduct, and not only of private life, and it is an outrage upon the truth of history to suppress them.

Henry's
schemes for
his children.

Traffic with
his son
Henry;

King Henry went on in life as he began. Having trafficked, to all appearance profitably, with himself, he trafficked not less shamefully with his infant children. His second son, Henry, was bargained with—it would be ludicrous to say betrothed—when he was seven years old, for a daughter of King Lewis, and the town and territory of Gisors, on the French border of Normandy, which was in dispute between the fathers. Margaret, a little lady of two or three years, was sent to Henry, to be brought up as his daughter-in-law; and her portion, Gisors, was put in custody of the Knights Templars, to hold till the marriage. The King of England had the marriage celebrated two years afterwards, and found means to obtain the sanction of two cardinal legates, Henry of Pisa and William of Pavia, of whom we shall hear again. He was then able to induce the Templars to deliver up to him the disputed territory. It was sharp practice, although within the letter of the contract; and it brought on a war between the fathers.

The traffic was continued with the other sons.

Geoffrey was dealt with the very year of his birth, ^{with Geoffrey ;} and married the lady and her inheritance in due time. She was Constance, daughter and heiress of Conan, Duke of Brittany. He appears not to have been grateful to his father for his provident management. Contemporaries speak of him as the worst of all the sons of Henry.

John, the youngest, infamous in English history, ^{with John ;} was bound by covenant, at the age of seven, to a daughter of the Count of Savoy. It came to nothing, and, three years after, Henry obtained for him the heiress of the Earl of Gloucester and her inheritance. Thirteen years afterwards they were married.

Henry's transactions with his son Richard and his affianced bride were a yet more iniquitous transgression, both of the private duties of a man and of the public duty of a king. First, when he was a year old, he was to marry a Spanish princess. That bargain fell through, and it was then arranged that he should marry Alais, another daughter of King Lewis, who, at three years old, was bound to him when he was seven. She was given, ^{with Richard.} with her sister Margaret, into the charge of Henry, and was brought to England, where she was still detained, more than thirty years after, when he died. But no marriage took place, and there had been negotiations, five years before, for marrying Richard to a daughter of the emperor.

E

The shameful fate of Alais of France ;

In the mean time King Lewis, and then Philip his son and successor, repeatedly demanded the fulfilment of the contract, and called in the aid of the pope, who threatened the kingdom of England with an interdict. Henry found means to avoid the sentence. At last, after his death, his successor Richard informed King Philip that it was impossible for him to marry his sister Alais; she had been his father's mistress, and had borne him a son. The sad tale was true. Philip consented to take her back, with money for her maintenance, and the restoration of Gisors.

and of Count Eudes's daughter.

Nor was this the only instance of King Henry's contempt both of private honour and of public obligation to a princess entrusted to him. Another in some respects was even worse, at least in the opinion of that age. A daughter of Eudes, Count of Brittany, became his prey, when in his charge as a hostage for some engagements with her father. This breach of a sacred trust was all the worse, because she was a near cousin to him, being a daughter's daughter of a sister of Henry's mother, Matilda.

Character of King Henry.

It is no wrong to him, therefore, to infer that his base and reckless selfishness was under no restraint of either private honour or public duty. His horrible impiety, reaching to open defiance of God, is one of the things which historians have permitted to be known.

He was a broad-built man, of middle height, with spherical head ; square, weather-tanned face ; full, round, prominent blue-grey eyes, mild as a dove's when he was in good humour, blood-shot and flashing fire when angry. His rages of wrath, ungoverned upon the least opposition to his will, upon continued resistance became savage to the verge of insanity. It was not unknown that his fingers would find their way to an offender's eyes ; and if he did not go the length of the miscreant Belesme, and tear them out, he confessed to a difficulty in restraining himself. Once, at least, he drew blood, and was hindered by others from doing worse.

With the legs of a horseman, he is described as having the "broad chest and brawny arms of a prize-fighter." He was great as a sportsman and a mighty hunter, and would keep his saddle over hill and dale till nightfall, and sit down to supper with neglected hands, livid with wounds. Except when eating or in the saddle, he seldom sat. And yet also, we have evidence, he could find pleasure in conversing with learned men, and even in intervals of quiet study. He was a learned king for his age.*

Already, when only twenty, by his conduct both in his continental provinces and in England, especially in the relief of Wallingford and the

* Letter decc. ; Girald. Camb., v. p. 302.

operations which led to it, he had proved himself a brilliant soldier, and had gained a reputation for military capacity, which was hardly borne out by any achievements of his subsequent life.

Otherwise, he was a young man of quick intelligence and imperious will ; prompt and decided in action ; not easily diverted from any purpose, sometimes open to persuasion, never turned by opposition. These qualities are seen both in other matters of business, and particularly when, after the examples of the kings before him, he sat upon the judgment seat. Along with them, there is a continual effort to assert a superiority, personal as well as kingly, over all around him. It is a mark of the same vanity that the transgression of any alleged law or custom is taken as a personal insult ; any resistance of his will, even the contradiction of any assertion he might make, although mistaken, as deserving the punishment of a rebel.

Becket's chaplain, Herbert, was sent into exile after him, and, in a hearing by the king, upon petition for his return because he had committed no offence, happened to speak of "the King of Germany."

"Why do you not call him by his proper title, Emperor of Germany?" Henry interposed.

"His title," Herbert answered, "is King of Germany ; and when he calls himself emperor, it is Emperor of the Romans."

To which the king replied, "This is abominable. Is this son of a priest to disturb my peace, and throw my kingdom into commotion?"

It was thus an offence against king and kingdom to question his knowledge of facts. Accordingly he pretended to have everything under his eye, and within his grasp, and could not endure that people should think affairs were managed by anybody but himself. Magistrates of every class, in all places, were subject to his personal interference.

It would be easier to believe that his activity was conducive to public order, if we found it so in his own household. We have a very different picture of it. He travelled about attended by marshals notorious for their own rapacity, and for their negligence of the followers of the court.

It need not, in those days, have been beneath the notice of so busy a man, that his attendants and followers were imposed upon with unwholesome meats and drinks. Of a master whose eye was everywhere we ought not to have heard complaint that the bread of his household was "heavy, mixed with cockle, half baked;" the wine "acid or mothery, muddy, greasy, rancid," with some other adjectives, showing that the writer was most alive to this grievance; "the beer, horrible to the taste and abominable to the sight; the meat, scarcely sound; the fish, four days old." Or, if the care of such things was beneath a king, at least he

was directly and personally to blame for what we further learn: "If a command had come down that the king would start early next morning for some place, for a certainty he would not rise before noon. Then you would see sumpter beasts waiting with their packages, carriages motionless, couriers nodding, tradesmen anxious, all muttering and whispering. To learn when the king would be ready you must visit the loose women and vintners, for this class of people generally know the secrets of the court; for the court of Henry II. is crowded with jesters, singers, gamesters, pastry-cooks, bankrupts, mummers, barbers, spendthrifts, and others of a similar class." *

It is a stock tale of English histories that this king initiated the reign of law. The English people have this one idea of his reign. When we look with attention at the facts to follow, everything will confirm the inference that the reign of law which he sought to establish in England was the reign of his own individual will.

Of any qualities of a high order, whether of statesmanship, or of fatherly interest in his people's welfare, we see few or none. He was good-natured, and capable of generous impulse, when all went smoothly. A writer of credit informs us that he was capable of compassion to the poor, and ready

* From "Peter of Blois," quoted by Mr. Hardy, "Descriptive Catalogue," ii. p. xxxviii.

and liberal in helping them ; but we shall search in vain, through his laws and "assizes," for any enactment for their benefit that looks beyond the punishment and repression of crime.

With his vast powers, at the head of dominions more extensive than almost any king of his age, it is difficult to discover that he had any policy higher than to provide great stations for his family, or to extend his despotism over the English people, and employ it for the augmentation of revenues to be expended, for the most part, in petty wars of no interest to them.

Whether or no he was endowed with powers of mind which might have made him a great king it is not easy to say, because, whatever his powers, they were soon overclouded by his despotic instincts, his self-will, his excessive vanity, his mad rages of wrath, and his ungoverned self-indulgence in the very various pleasures to which he was addicted.

CHAPTER IV.

THOMAS THE CHANCELLOR.

1154. THE young king has been allowed to share with his ministers in the credit of their early and vigorous measures for the re-establishment of order, in pursuance of the provisions of Wallingford. He was fortunate in the inheritance of two men of large powers, Richard de Luci, already chief justiciar, and the new chancellor. The principal merit in the renovation of society belongs to them, one or both of them.

The inter-
regnum.
Public order
maintained.

De Luci and other ministers of higher rank, with Archbishop Theobald for their chief, had no difficulty in maintaining order during the weeks between the death of Stephen and the arrival of his successor. The state of the country had been very different upon the last vacancy of the throne. As soon as it was heard that Henry I. was dead, all the forests were broken, and the herds of thousands of deer disappeared as if by magic. The hungry villagers kept unwonted carnival.

When Henry, grandson of the former Henry, arrived he found the country undisturbed. The experience of twenty years had not been all a loss to the nation. Their terrible sufferings had taught the people patience, and quickened the intellect of their rulers.

The return of peace was already giving new life to the exhausted nation. The continuance of peace, under a firm government, brought renewed prosperity. Stephen's mercenary soldiers, who had possession of Kent and some other districts, were ordered to leave the country, and saw the necessity of compliance. William of Ypres, their chief, set sail with tears in his eyes. "The Flemings went home to their looms," so it was said. Peasants came back from the woods to the villages; the labourer returned to his plough, and the lord to his manor-house. King Stephen had already demolished many of the castles which had been so much abused. All those built during his reign were now destroyed, except a few, thought likely to be useful in the king's hands. Three or four lords who offered resistance were compelled to submit. The king was strong enough to resume possession of all the Crown estates bestowed by Stephen upon his adherents. Those of Norman lords who had fallen during the troubles were restored to their families.

Some restraint put upon the barbarities of

Measures to
establish it.

wreckers upon the coasts showed a more minute attention to good government.

What was of larger importance, the Scottish king, after some hesitation, surrendered the three northern counties, Northumberland, Westmoreland, and Cumberland, of which he had held possession for some time, and did homage for the Lothians.

Early in the reign, itinerant justices were sent over the country to assess the royal revenue, and decide questions concerning it; and, what was their secondary duty, auxiliary to the other, to punish crimes. They were no new institution, but had lately fallen into disuse.

In short, there was so much life and wisdom in every department of the administration, that the condition of the kingdom was soon marvellously improved. During the last year of Stephen, and the first four or five of Henry, it passed from a state of dissolution to one of growing prosperity under a settled government. There was evidence of a mind, or minds, of large intellect and experience. The young soldier-king, whatever his powers, had neither the knowledge nor the experience for such a work in its manifold complexity, although, no doubt, he entered into it, and, it would appear, with heart and spirit. But he was in close friendship and daily intimacy with a man whose capacity for affairs had raised him from middle life to his high place; who, as Theobald's secretary,

had been so highly esteemed, that he could command any preferment he chose to ask for ; and whose talents were as well-known at Rome as they were in England. What we are told by an impartial annalist is, therefore, what we might expect. Thomas the Chancellor was spoken of as "the guide and master of the king." *

The work
of Becket.

We cannot reasonably doubt that the surprising change upon the face of the country, and the general prosperity of the first ten years of the reign,† were mainly the work of Becket. When, after eight or nine years, he ceased to be chancellor there was a rapid change, both in the king himself and in the measures of government. In his personal conduct Henry became his own guide, and what that meant we shall see. His public measures took their complexion from the justiciar, who resumed the full influence of his office which the chancellor had eclipsed.

The chancellor, in that age, had peculiar opportunities for guiding the administration by his influence upon the royal mind. Originally, as an officer of the household, he had charge of the royal chapel. His duties had been enlarged, till at this time he was the king's general secretary of state. He attended all councils, sealed the royal edicts

Duties of the
chancellor ;

* Gervase, i. 169.

† "The first ten years of the reign were singularly happy and prosperous" (Stubbs, "Select Charters," p. 123).

and all deeds that required sealing—some, after their adoption by the council, others without it. He was the keeper of the seal. It had also fallen to his office to receive the incomes of vacant bishoprics, abbacies, baronies, and to relieve the king of all the more arduous duties which might interfere with his absorbing pursuits of hunting and hawking—"might disturb him in his pleasures, or in more weighty business of State." That is the amiable alternative of a highly esteemed chronicler.*

In the age we are upon, the chancellor acted, or was supposed to act, under his master's eye. During the king's long absences in his continental states the high justiciar was generally at the head of the administration, with the title of "prefect of the kingdom." Sometimes there were two justiciars; Robert Earl of Leicester held the office, for some years, with De Luci. But for matters requiring more than ordinary tact and ability the king would sometimes send his special commission to his chancellor Thomas.

enlarged
under
Becket.

One instance of such special commission is particularly mentioned. The king was desirous to obtain the homage of the chief estates to his son Henry, as his successor. The younger Henry had been for some time in the charge of the chancellor, and, with some of the sons of the greater

* William of Newburgh, book ii. c. i.

barons, was brought up under tutors in his house. The king was beyond sea, and sent his commission on this important matter, not to the justiciar, but to the chancellor. It was one, says a well-informed biographer, which could hardly have been carried through without tumult, in the king's presence. To the surprise of everybody, it was effected, under the management of the chancellor, without resistance of word or act.*

Becket was chancellor when an important measure took effect which, incidentally or with intention, struck a serious blow at the baronage and the feudal institutions. Since the Conquest, the barons had been bound, on summons, to be at the king's service with their knights and forces for forty days of the year. This service was now commuted for a scutage, or money payment of so much for every shield. The king got English money, instead of English men with their Anglo-French captains; and he hired mercenary soldiers for his service abroad, in wars of no English interest. Whether the king or his chancellor looked further or not, it is accounted an important measure of the reign; and it is not the only one that tended to abate the independent powers of the barons, which had been so much abused.

It was a further innovation, that the new tax was levied upon the ecclesiastical barons; and the

Institution
of scutage
money.

It is levied
upon bishops
and abbots.

* Rog. Pont., c. 15.

measure was enforced by Becket, against the remonstrances of his patron the archbishop. His friends excused him by the peremptory commands of the king, but more as a conjecture than a known fact.* Whether he was principal or agent, the king would take note of his conduct. It was another proof that Thomas was no Church-partisan. He did not care to maintain any immunities of the wealthy clergy to the detriment of the king's exchequer.

General
vigour of
Becket's ad-
ministration.

His whole conduct, when he was chancellor, was marked by the same ability and vigour. It was a time of active rebuilding. The Palace, or Tower of London, which he found a ruin, was repaired between Easter and Whitsuntide by the employment of a staff of workmen so numerous "that a man could hardly hear his neighbour speak."

Splendour
of his
household.

People were surprised by the magnificence of his retinue and household. He had his hawks and hounds, like the king, but took little interest in sports, or had not time for them. Whatever his motives, he outstript all royal officers before him

* Bishop Stubbs thinks "it was perhaps advised by the chancellor, who did not till a much later period betray any sympathy with the cause of clerical immunities" ("Constitutional History," p. 454). I find good evidence, although not quite of perfect demonstration, that he had before this shown sympathy with clerical immunities; and I should infer from his whole life that he must have done so. The question will recur. And did he *ever* betray sympathy with any clerical immunity from taxation?

in surrounding himself with the splendid trappings of wealth and high official rank. It can hardly be doubtful that he kept his state with the king's approval, and perhaps, in some degree, as his representative. He must have known that his great scale of housekeeping, his board resplendent with gold and silver, his sumptuous daily table, were no offence to his master, but the contrary. Earls and barons sat down to it daily. It was accounted among his luxuries that his hall floor was covered every day in winter with fresh hay or straw, and in summer with fresh rushes or green leaves, on which the knights could throw themselves in their fine dresses when the benches and long settles were all filled. Henry himself would sometimes ride into the hall and take a draught, or, dismounted, would leap over the table and sit down to eat. Yet he sometimes made a joke of his chancellor's splendour. Riding together in a London street on a cold winter's day, the king espied an old man scantily clad and shivering, and pleasantly suggested that it would be a charitable act of the chancellor archdeacon to make the man a present of a gorgeous new cape of scarlet and fur which he wore. Thomas did not readily agree to the proposal; and the king laid hold of the cape, and was so bent upon pulling it off, that, after a struggle, it became prudent to let it go. The old man was enriched; there was loud laughter of

attendant knights, and many cloaks and capes were at the chancellor's service.*

His
pompous
embassy to
Paris,
1160.

The event of his chancellorship which more than anything impressed the vulgar mind with his magnificence, was long remembered, and has been often told, was his great fantastic retinue when he went, as king's envoy, to demand the hand of Margaret, the infant child of King Lewis of France, for the younger Henry. His progress from town to town, from the coast to Paris, was more like a strange triumphal procession than an embassy, and the particular account of it which we have † is worthy of notice in itself, as well as in the conduct of a personage so remarkable.

First marched two hundred and fifty footmen, in companies of six to ten, singing the songs of their country. After them, at a distance, packs of hounds and harriers, in couples, with their keepers all gaily dressed. Then eight huge waggons, each of them drawn by five fine cavalry horses, every horse with walking groom, and every waggon with driver and guard, and a noble dog, like a bear or lion. One waggon carried the furniture of the chancellor's chapel; another, that of his chamber; another, of his kitchen. Three were laden with comestibles and baggage, and two with huge iron-bound barrels of fine English beer, for the delectation of the Parisians. After the waggons marched

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 14.

† *Ibid.*, c. 18.

a troop of baggage horses, each with its load ; one, prominent before the others, bearing the sacred vessels, ornaments, and books of the altar ; the others, laden with furniture and clothing and coffers of plate and money, for use and for gifts. Every horse had its groom, riding knees on haunches, dressed suitably to his charge, with a long-tailed monkey perched upon the top of the load. After a respectful interval came a company of squires, bearing the shields of their knights and leading their chargers ; then other squires, pages of the household, falconers with their birds upon their fists, butlers, stewards, attendants, ushered on the greater personages of the procession,—a cavalcade of knights and clergy, two and two, going before the great chancellor himself, with his friends and attendants all on horseback.

The procession, it may be imagined, excited amazement and curiosity wherever it passed. Frenchmen poured out to see it, exclaiming, “ Whose family is this ? ”

“ It is the chancellor of the King of the English.”

“ What a wonderful man the King of the English must be, if this is the state of his chancellor on his travels ! ”

It must have been to astonish the people, and to commend the king and his embassy to the French Court, that the great show was devised, and was followed up, as it was, by costly gifts of gold

F

and silver vessels, rich garments and horses to French nobles and citizens of Paris, and by suitable presents to the royal servants, and to the masters and scholars of the schools. At all events, the service was done to the king's satisfaction, as Theobald's had been at Rome.

Whence his
means for

Yet this magnificence of life and this costly parade gave rise, naturally enough, to keen remark. There were people who inquired—there are still—and in no friendly spirit, where he found the money for his enormous outlay. The legitimate income of the chancellor, supported by all his Church preferments, could not suffice, it was assumed, for so much profusion. It is a question which will arise again; and may call for some attention when it does.

And for his
warrior
exploits?

Thomas the Chancellor also gained distinction in another and quite different employment. In deacon's orders, and loaded with Church preferments, he was also a soldier of great fame. In a war with the King of France about Toulouse, and in that concerning Gisors, the chancellor's equipments and exploits surpassed those of any of the barons.

War of
Toulouse,
1159.

At Toulouse, Henry was at the head of a great army, drawn from all his dominions, and with English money. Becket brought into the field seven hundred knights, and a large company of mercenaries. In corslet and helmet, he led his

men in battle, took strong castles, and fought in single combat with a valiant French knight, and unhorsed him. The London games turned out useful to him. No soldiers were better than his, and no general was more capable. If Henry had followed his advice, Toulouse would have been taken, and the French king along with it. So it was said : it was also said that Henry held back in a chivalrous regard to his feudal superior.

It is possible that such may have been his motive, although it was not believed, at least in France. If it was, it is to be noted as a peculiar scruple of the age. Even the red-faced king was said to have his knightly scruples.

The chancellor was troubled with no such compunctions. What he did, he did thoroughly, in war or peace. His deeds in war were a sore perplexity to some of the biographers of the saint. "At the head of a strong force," says one of them, "he burnt towns and villages without pity, and was the cause of death to many people." *

Thus, in every public action, and in many spheres of action, Thomas Becket stood among the first of men, and always with something that was all his own. He was a great soldier ; he was one of the greatest of rulers and administrators. While showing the king the way to victory, while transforming a kingdom from horrors of intestine

Wide versatility of conduct.

* Grim, c. 15.

disorder to peace and prosperity under a settled government, he was, at the same time, continually relieving the king of his high judicial duties—he was the first chancellor who sat as judge, to administer justice,—and also, with a staff of fifty-two clerks, was doing the ordinary work of his office: and, ready for any service, could rebuild the ruined Tower in a few weeks; or, sent upon embassy, with instructions to create an impression, did astonish the natives among whom he went, as perhaps no ambassador has done before or since: and all with such facility, that he was ready, at a moment's notice, to take part with his young master in boyish romps, or to do the gleeful honours when he came suddenly into his hall and jumped over the table.

Services so various must have gained him a high name among English patriots, if he had not merited a patriot's honours by a higher service still, and lost them all in—what, to that age, was a higher glory—the honours it paid him as its saint and martyr.

His steady
rectitude.

Great as were his services to England as chancellor, they were still greater in his consistent rectitude of conduct, both personally and in his relations with the king. His personal character comes out consistently, and is the same in all his greatness as it had been observed in the London playgrounds. His biographers, without intending

it, show us by facts that he was still the old Thomas of London. His love of justice and liberty, his hatred of oppression and wrong, grew and increased along with his ability to maintain them. In all his splendour and pomp, his doors were always open to the miserable and the wronged. The cause of the widow could always reach his ears. He never failed, when occasion was given him, to see justice done, and to avenge the poor. He had now the ability ; and he used it, both as a just judge and as a wealthy lord. If earls and barons frequented his table daily, there was provision also for many guests who had no dinner of their own.

These accounts of him rest upon evidence that carries its own demonstration to a certainty beyond what is common for the Middle Ages. There were people then who said it was all ostentation. There are people still who say it ; sometimes with the additional imputation that the biographers of "the saint" were not only full of the superstition of the age, but were misguided by prejudice in their narratives of common facts. The imputation is groundless ; but the best answer to it is the whole tenor of the man's life. Events to follow will confirm all we know of him already.

If the love of justice was in his nature, and his old intolerance of overbearing tyranny still alive in him, they must have caused him many a weary

His manage-
ment of the
king

contention, or still more wearisome submission of silence, when he was serving a king sprung from "the tyrants' broods"—it is the language of contemporaries,—the houses of Normandy and Anjou. In all his grandeur, and he was all but king, he confessed with tears, and more than once, to Theobald, that he was weary of his life, and wished himself free from the ties of office.*

in his
despotic
outbreaks.

We have particular accounts, in several instances, of his struggles against tyranny and wrong; and his patient endeavours, and even artifice, to curb and turn the capricious freaks of the royal self-will. It was an arduous work, no doubt, to control and guide this king.

The Archdeacon of London had given some offence to the king, and his revenge was quick and arbitrary.† He sent and turned the whole household of the archdeacon into the streets, closed the house, and published it for sale by auction. Thomas did not rest till he had done all he could to repair the outrage. He was able to talk the despot into reason, and obtained restitution of the property.

In the dispute between the rival popes, the courts of England and France, with many bishops and nobles, met at Neuf-Marché‡ to discuss the question. It was decided to adhere to Alexander. Presently

* John Salisbury, c. 7.

† Fitz-Stephen, c. 16.

‡ "Novum forum," Fitz-Stephen, c. 17.

the king heard that the aged Archbishop of Rouen, without asking his consent, had sent his Archdeacon Gilo to his suffragan bishops, requiring them to give their obedience to Alexander. The archbishop had waited, it appears, for the decision of the two kings, but did not wait for Henry's commands. Perhaps he made some show of independence. If he did anything unlawful, a king who has obtained the credit of a lawmaker might have been expected to deal with him in something like a lawful and deliberate manner. Instead of that he acted as the tyrant he really was. He did not venture to discharge his wrath upon the aged archbishop, but he issued his order to pull down the house of the archdeacon, his messenger. Thomas again interposed: "My lord and king, the house you have ordered to be pulled down is the Archdeacon Gilo's; but I am lodging in it at present." That saved it.

The next day, the king heard that the Bishop of Le Mans, then with the court, had followed the example of the archbishop, and had sent his obedience to Pope Alexander. Henry fell into one of his fits of rage, because the bishop had acted without his royal license and command. His marshals, to pacify him, or under his orders, went to the bishop's lodgings and turned him out. They tossed his baggage into the street, and let loose his horses. The bishop had to get out of the way with what speed he could.

Le Mans was Henry's birthplace, and he took an interest in the town and people. He showed it now by an order he had drawn and sent to them, immediately to pull down their bishop's house. Before it went, he held it up in his hand to the crowd of courtiers, exclaiming, "The people of Le Mans will hear news of their bishop." Everybody was shocked ; the chancellor, more than all, must have felt deep shame.

But the royal fury was seen to be too hot to be touched incautiously. Thomas therefore managed that the messengers should spend four days upon their journey to Le Mans, instead of two. The next day he got the bishops to go in successive parties and entreat the king to pardon the Bishop of Le Mans. He came last himself. It was all in vain. Again, the day following, with like failure. Henry was determined to appear great in the eyes of the people of his birthplace, and this was his idea of greatness. At last, when he expected that his order was beyond recall, he granted the pardon so earnestly desired. The chancellor immediately despatched it, with strict orders to hasten day and night. His messenger was in time, and the king, when his fury cooled, was thankful that he had been deluded,—a man not without generous feeling in his quiet moods, but often unreasoning ; not seldom frantic ; always, before all things, selfish.

The conduct of Thomas Becket during the years

following, when he was archbishop, has ever since moved the attention and the curiosity of Englishmen. In reality, if we consider a little, the years of his chancery will appear quite as remarkable. That he should have been able to manage such a man as Henry of Anjou, and to retain his friendship, is a marvel of tact and patience. Everything was in his hands so entirely, that there was no question of any act he did ; nor, it will appear perhaps, of any moneys he received.

A distant acquaintance with King Henry II., a little knowledge of whence and what he was, and what he did, cannot fail to suggest the question,—how he can have gained the character he holds with Englishmen, of a king to be honoured for his endeavours to establish a government by law ; and, as some writers will tell us, of a ruler possessed, even from his accession, almost in his boyhood, of large and enlightened ideas for his people's welfare, and of a mind centuries before its age, in its aims for amending the laws !

It is true that new rules and methods for the detection and punishment of thieves, and murderers, and other criminals were issued, from time to time, during the reign. Whatever merit they may possess belongs chiefly to De Luci. The king may share it with him, in so far as the eagerness of his grasping despotism became a motive of action to the minister. His inordinate

Henry's
reputation
as a law-
giver

is De Luci's.
His own
purpose not
law but
self-will.

self-will, his vain-glorious affectation of mastery—qualities essentially defiant of law—became the origins of his reputation as a law-maker. Not an inhabitant of England, from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the meanest villager of a lord's manor, but must feel himself dependent for life and home, and in every action of his life, upon the master of the land. No man's duty, however sacred, must cross his purpose: no privilege must impede his plans: no franchise must be closed against his entrance.

These characteristics, already indicated, will find their ample evidence in facts hereinafter to follow.

The reign
alters with
the minister.

The measures of the reign vary, in three distinct periods, with the guiding mind. The activity of law-making, already essayed by De Luci during the supremacy of Becket, came into full action upon his retirement, when De Luci became the leading minister; reached its height in the "Constitutions of Clarendon" of 1164, and the penal edicts of the "Assize of Clarendon" in 1166; and slackened or almost ceased when De Luci retired from office, ten years before the king's death. His successor Glanvill, a great judge and writer, did not show the same zeal for fresh penal expedients.

Laws, old
and new.

What may have been the value and ultimate effects of the criminal and fiscal enactments of the reign, is a question that needs more extensive comparison with laws before and after them than

it has obtained. The old English laws, from Ethelbert of Kent to Edward called the Confessor, show some real regard for the people's welfare. Those of Henry II. discover no regard for the miseries of the poor, as long as they do not lead to crime. Then they interpose, with cruel and inhuman punishments, and for small offences.

The Norman kings had need of cruel edicts, to preserve their lives and acquisitions among an outraged people. One king, and many lesser men, from the king downwards, paid the penalty of their misdeeds. The laws and assizes of the first Angevin have generally a purpose beyond this. It is their common purpose, conspicuous upon the most cursory study of them, to provide, directly or indirectly, for securing and increasing the profits of his great English estate. With this view, they are always clear and searching; and, for the detection of frauds and evasions, are so skilfully drawn, whoever drew them, that they would do credit to any banker or accountant of the present day.

Any idea of laws for his people's welfare, Henry could neither have inherited by blood, nor gained by education from his ancestors on either side. We have had instances of his disposition to arbitrary rule, regardless of all law. We shall have accounts of his endeavours to extend his despotism and to rivet its fetters. The honour of a zeal for

Purpose of
cruel penal
laws.

law can hardly be allowed to a man whom we find defiant of all law or right that happens to cross his will and pleasure, or to thwart him in any course of angry personal revenge.

Penal laws
no boast to
England.

In the department of penal laws, the "Constitutional History of England" is not a study in which Englishmen can find much cause for pride or pleasure.

The criminal laws of this king and his successors, and their ministers, down to a time within living memory, resulted in the horrors of men, women, and even children, continually hanged in gangs all over the country, for a multitude of small offences, and often innocent people among them.

But English life and liberty have no more had their origins in penal laws or administration, than they owe one spark of their vitality to Henry of Anjou or his Norman progenitors.

CHAPTER V.

THE KING UPON THE JUDGMENT-SEAT—THE
BATTLE ABBEY CASE.

BECKET was chancellor, when a celebrated dispute 1157.
between Hilary, Bishop of Chichester, and the
Abbot of Battle was heard and determined by
the king himself, sitting with his council.* The
abbot claimed, by his charters, to be exempt from
the bishop's jurisdiction. The bishop denied his
claim of privilege, and was supported by the arch-
bishop, and by papal letters of Pope Adrian, re-
quiring the abbot to submit himself to his bishop.
The proceedings in the case have peculiar interest
in several particulars, although the question itself
may now have none.

The abbot laid his complaints before the king. Privileges
of Battle
Abbey.
The origin of the abbey and its privileges made
it peculiarly a case for the royal eye, and Henry
summoned both parties to Bury St. Edmunds at
Whitsuntide, 1157. He was there on the festival

* "Chronicle of Battle Abbey."

day, which happened to be St. Dunstan's (May 19), and kept it right royally, wearing his crown in a great assembly of bishops, abbots, earls, barons, and a multitude of people. The bishop and abbot and their friends were there ; but the king could not hear the case, because, the "Chronicle of the Abbey" informs us, he was occupied with other business.

Trial at
Colchester.

It was therefore adjourned to Colchester, and was there heard in the chapter-house of the monastery, in an assembly of lords and prelates and a multitude of people.

The chancellor took a leading part in the proceedings ; he and the justiciar appear as the two principal persons, after the king—acting, however, both of them, rather as advocates than as judges. De Luci is the abbot's brother, and pleads his cause. The chancellor's part is visibly in accordance with the feelings and intentions of the king, but not without good ground for believing the abbot to be in the right.

The Abbot's
claim stated
by De Luci,
May 24,
1157.

The case was opened by De Luci—"My Lord and King: Your excellency has deigned to issue your summons to the Abbot of Battle, my brother, to appear in this place for the settlement, in your presence, of the long-standing dispute between him and the Bishop of Chichester, concerning the liberties and privileges of their churches. The abbot is in attendance with his charters and proofs of privilege."

The charter of foundation, and some others confirmatory of it, were then read. The original charter of King William,* attested by himself, by Archbishop Lanfranc, the Archbishop of York, four other bishops, and as many lords, which is still in existence, exempts the Abbey of Battle from all subjection to bishops, and from lordship of all persons whatsoever, as entirely as the Church of Christ at Canterbury. The king took the charters in his hands, and thanked God for the wisdom of the illustrious king who had founded the abbey and made it what it was. If ever it should please God to put it into his mind to found an abbey, he would take care that it should be endowed with exactly the liberties and dignities conferred upon the Abbey of Battle. He ordered all the charters to be carefully preserved.

The king's
interest in it.

De Luci resumed his pleading, and skilfully identified the privileges of the abbey with the royal authority. It was the king's own free chapel, and the pledge of his royal crown. He appealed to the pride and self-interest at once of the foreign king and the Norman lords. The abbey was called the Abbey of Battle, because there the battle was fought by the illustrious William, and the victory gained, to which King Henry owed his crown, "and we, the Normans, our greatest possessions."

When he ceased, the barons took up a cry in

* Rymer, at date.

The barons
shout their
assent.

which they were so much interested. The king, they said, will maintain the abbey as he would his crown. The king declared that the abbey should lose none of its privileges. He would confer with the bishop, and arrange matters peaceably.

De Luci on
French and
English in
England.

In this, apparently, he failed. The court sat again, after a few days' adjournment, and De Luci resumed his argument, and dwelt yet more strongly upon the wide distinction between the two peoples of the land. He prayed the king, in the name of the assembled Norman nobles, and for the standing assertion of his own supremacy and of theirs, to maintain the privileges of the abbey against all adversaries, and especially, and with all the royal authority, against the plots of the English people.

This appeal to the king, in an assembly of Norman-French and English people, is sufficient, if it stood alone, to impose upon the incidental statement concerning the two races, already referred to, the limited signification that no precise line of separation could be drawn between the French and the English. That is true ; nevertheless they were, most of them, wide of the dubious line, and regarded themselves as two peoples still.

Answer of
Bishop
Hilary.

After the speech of De Luci, the chancellor called upon Bishop Hilary for his answer. Hilary was not a man of discreet speech, and soon entangled himself in a question between the Church's jurisdiction and the king's. He magnified the

authority of bishops : " No bishop could be deposed from his office without the permission of the prince of the apostles." The king interrupted him : " True, he cannot be deposed ; but," and he held out his hands, " by outstretched hands he can be expelled." There was laughter. The bishop, however, held to his position, and went on to deny the right even of a king to confer liberties and dignities on churches without confirmation by the pope.

The king got angry, and desired Hilary to submit himself to correction for his crafty attack on the royal prerogative, charging the archbishop and the bishops to do justice upon him. It offends the king.

Loud murmurs ensued and lasted for some time. Then the bishop, reminded by the chancellor of his oath of obedience to the king, disclaimed all intention of disobedience, and endeavoured to appease the king with flattering words. He was roughly repulsed, but was allowed to resume his argument.

During the reign of Stephen, he said, the abbot had paid him all due obedience. He had received him, as was due to his bishop ; had entertained him hospitably, and had made him gifts at his departure. " For which," interposed Henry of Essex, " you are making him an ungracious return. It won't encourage others to show you hospitality."

Hilary went on to allege that the abbot's con-

G

duct was changed after the death of the Bishop of London ; insinuating, it was understood, that the abbot had been a candidate for the vacant see, and suspected the bishop of injuring his prospects of the succession. He concluded by entreating the king to decide the matter in accordance with the customs of the Church.

The king expressed his displeasure that the bishop had spoken lightly of charters of the kings, his predecessors. "Far be it from me, far from the excellency of my kingdom, that what I shall decree, upon mature consideration, with the advice of my archbishops, bishops, and barons, should be called in question by you, or any like you."

The abbot briefly replied, again exhibiting the original charter, which the bishop declared he had never seen or heard of till now. The abbot would have proceeded, but Henry stopped him : it was not for him, but for himself, to defend the claims of the abbey as his own prerogative. The decision of the matter was with the king himself.

A tumult
stayed by
De Luci.

A desultory conversation ensued, and lasted for some time, till De Luci prayed the king that the abbot might be allowed to take counsel with his friends. The king assented, and went to hear Mass, while De Luci withdrew with the abbot, the Archbishop of York, the chancellor, and several others. Mass over, Henry resumed his seat, and the chancellor came forward to speak. Great attention, we

The chan-
cellor pleads
the abbot's
case.

are told, was paid by all, while he made his eloquent speech. The purport of it appears to be, not only that the privileges of the abbey should be maintained, but that Bishop Hilary should be punished and humiliated for putting Church authority in opposition to the royal prerogative, and for bringing papal letters into the kingdom without the king's knowledge and consent.

The chancellor begins with courteous answer to the bishop, relying principally upon the original charter of the abbey. Then adverting to some incidental facts, he is more severe. The abbot, he says, never suspected him of any ill service concerning the see of London ; but the guilty person thinks all things are against him, and perhaps the bishop's conscience of ill service has led him to see the abbot in a false light.

To an assertion of the bishop that King Stephen had summoned them upon the case, and that the abbot failed to appear, a flat denial is given. The abbot did, on the day appointed, appear before the king and several witnesses, whose names are given. They can certify to his appearance, and to the king's promise of protection.

The bishop now alleges that he excommunicated the abbot : but he had not treated him as excommunicate. On the contrary, when, in the first year of the king's reign, they attended Mass together, and the king was present, in Westminster Abbey,

Hilary received the Pax to kiss and handed it, first to the king, and then to his neighbour the abbot, thereby signifying that he gave him the kiss of peace, as a son of the Church and a good Christian.

This was a hard hit for Hilary. "If in that," he replied, "I acted ignorantly or inadvertently, the fault is mine. I will confess it to the archbishop, and do whatever penance he imposes."

Then, after another quiet allusion to the ratification of the abbey charter by Archbishop Lanfranc, and the prelates and nobles of the time, he returns to the attack. The bishop complains that the abbot entered his chapter-house of Chichester with haughty and contentious bearing. "Not so," he answers; "he came under compulsion, and conducted himself peaceably. Your two deans of Lewes and Hastings, with five priests, came to him at Battle with a letter of Pope Adrian, which you had obtained, summoning him to appear on a certain day in the cathedral of Chichester, to hear the pope's commands. The king was abroad at the time, and the abbot could not submit the summons to him, and take his pleasure upon it. Therefore, upon the advice of the archbishop and his own friends, he presented himself on the day appointed, and entered the chapter-house to hear the pope's commands, in the presence of the messengers you had sent to him. Your clergy then and there endeavoured to put constraint upon

Hilary had obtained a pope's bull in his favour

him, to induce him to an act which would have been derogatory to the royal authority" (to sign a profession of obedience to the Bishop of Chichester). "This he refused to do: and he withdrew, and made everything known to the king."

Hereupon the king's countenance was altered, "The form of his visage was changed." "What," he said, "is it the fact, that you obtained this letter, as we have heard? By the faith you owe me, and your oath upon it, I insist that you give me a truthful answer to this question."

The bishop was evidently alarmed by the royal words and countenance. He declared, by his sworn fealty, that it was not he who obtained the papal letter, nor any one else with his knowledge. The abbot himself had brought it in. He had sent one of his monks to Rome, to defame his bishop. "But I am well known to all the members of the curia. My honour and my integrity are not unknown to the dwellers at Rome. The abbot could not possibly injure me there by his defamation. The result was, he brought down the pope's letter upon himself."

"A mighty strange thing," the king interposed, "that the abbot should have brought in the pope's letters against himself and his church."

At the same point of Hilary's speech, the archbishop, who knew that Hilary had procured the letter in question, devoutly crossed himself, in

Which exasperates the king.

Hilary denies his act.

deprecation of Divine judgment upon the audacious falsehood.

The chancellor went on: The king was not only resolved to know the truth of the letter which the abbot had had, but required Bishop Hilary to produce any other papal letters, injurious to the Abbey of Battle, which he might hold, or others for him.

The bishop replied, upon oath, to the amazement of all, that he had no papal letters whatever to the detriment of the abbot or church of Battle, procured either by himself or any other person for him.

' The arch-
bishop
claims to
decide.

Hereupon, the archbishop asked the king's permission that they should consider and determine the matter by the judicial procedure of ecclesiastical custom.

The king
himself will
decide.

"Not so," the king said: "I will not ask you to decide these questions. I will take your advice and assistance, in open council, and will myself give the final decision."

Mode of
proceeding.

He rose, as he so said, and went out with the whole council, except the bishop and abbot, into the monks' churchyard. After a consultation there, he sent for the bishop. Further discussion ensued, of which apparently the chronicler has no particular information; but the tenor of it is plain from what follows.

The Earl of Essex was sent to bring in the

abbot and his monks. As soon as they were placed, the king gave a sign to the bishop, who rose and made declaration before all, that he acknowledged the church of Battle to be a royal chapel, over which he had and ought to have no jurisdiction, and to be free and quit of every claim he had alleged over it; that he absolved the abbot, and had exceeded his rightful powers in excommunicating him; and that, considering the pre-eminent dignity of him and his church, he neither could claim, nor ought to have demanded anything from him, except of kindness and goodwill: and he made his public declaration, that from that day forward and for ever, the abbot was free of all bishop's claims and customs.

Hilary is
humbled.

"And this," the king added, "it is understood you do and declare, under no compulsion, but of your own free will."

"Yes; of my own free will, right and reason so compelling, I so do and declare."

Then the archbishop, praying the king's pardon for whatever the bishop had spoken unadvisedly against his royal authority, entreated him to give the bishop the kiss of peace. "I forgive him all," he said, "and for your prayers and love, I will give him, not once but a hundred times, the kiss of peace!" He rose and embraced Hilary, and kissed him. Then, upon the archbishop's intercession and at the king's command, the kiss of peace was

exchanged between the bishop and the abbot, and between the bishop and the justiciar.

All parties pretended to be satisfied: evidently the king was; and in this transaction we see him at his best, when things went in accordance with his wish and will.

Significance
of the
proceedings.

The proceedings of this council, and of some others in the life of Becket, give us an insight into the great councils convoked by Henry, from time to time, of which, generally, we know little or nothing, except the decrees issued in his name and theirs. They consisted of lords clerical and lay, and other chief tenants of the king, or as many of them as he chose to summon; for he could always constitute the assembly as he thought proper. Opinions were freely expressed; too freely, when they were in accordance with his will and pleasure. To express opposite opinions brought insult and humiliation to the speaker; and, we shall see, worse consequences, if they were persisted in.

The claim of Archbishop Theobald to decide a question of Church franchises according to ecclesiastical custom, was overruled, we have seen, by the king's word. He was always ready—it implied no depth of policy—to assert his personal supremacy. But there were, in this case, special reasons for the king's personal jurisdiction.

CHAPTER VI.

THOMAS ARCHBISHOP.

ARCHBISHOP THEOBALD was not likely to be well pleased with the conduct of the chancellor in the case of Battle Abbey. His action concerning the scutage money gave offence to many churchmen. And these were not his only faults. A short time before his death, Theobald even threatened to excommunicate the chancellor.

It would appear that whatever were Becket's merits in other respects, Theobald and Henry of Winchester had counted too much upon him as a churchman. Churchmen disappointed in Becket. It was not that he was changed in himself by his change of masters. In either service, he was no churchman in any professional sense of the word. In both of them he was a faithful servant: but he could hold his own, where it was right and necessary; for he did so with the king. Sometimes, as we have seen, he was able to frustrate an impulsive outbreak. That he always succeeded is not likely. But we have evidence, in more than one

instance, that even when chancellor, he persisted in opposition to the king, where he believed him to be wrong.

As chan-
cellor he had
differences
with the
king.

It is remarkable that the few instances we have, in which he strove and failed, are in matters concerning the Church; and we shall find that his conduct upon them, when he was chancellor, is entirely in accordance with his conduct upon similar questions when he became archbishop.

One instance of his opposition to the king and his failure, was the marriage of Mary, a daughter of King Stephen. She was Abbess of Ramsey, when Henry gave his consent to her marrying a younger son of the Earl of Flanders, with the county of Blois for her portion. The chancellor
1160. opposed the marriage. It took place, however, after she had been got away surreptitiously; and Thomas had an enemy for life in Matthew, Earl of Boulogne.*

In another instance of the kind, one more important, the king desisted for a time from his purpose, but revived it against Thomas the archbishop. It will be more conveniently considered when it comes to the surface.

Death of
Archbishop
Theobald,
1161.

Henry and his chancellor were on the terms of intimacy which had subsisted between them for seven years, when Archbishop Theobald died; and it became necessary for the king to look out

* Matt. Paris, "Hist. Maj.," vol. ii. p. 216.

for a new-primate. The see remained vacant for some time. Whatever the reason, twelve months elapsed before it became known that Thomas the chancellor was to succeed to it. Most likely the account is true, which speaks of transactions with the monks with that intention.

A few persons had conjectured, from the first, that he would be the man. He was the king's devoted servant—in the king's eyes (and there were those who knew it) the one qualification for the primacy. If Henry had known as much of his chancellor as the chancellor knew of him, the subsequent history of England would have been different.

Henry knew well that the man he had selected to be the head of the English Church, judged by all the religious feelings and prejudices of the time, was, of all his subjects, one of the least qualified for the office. He was no Churchman. He was not even a priest, and had never said Mass. He had taken minor orders only to qualify for drawing salaries from Church benefices. But fit or unfit, it was the king's resolve to have a man for archbishop who would be serviceable to himself.

His motives are mostly or quite intelligible.

He could rely upon Thomas, as the friend and supporter of his house in the succession. He had served him well in Stephen's reign, and had had his son, the younger Henry, his pupil in his house.

The archbishop "designate."

An arbitrary appointment.

The king's ives.

Henry could have the same confidence in him, if any question should arise between the king and the pope. Troublesome questions had arisen and were likely to recur. In some of these, the papacy was, at this time, almost at open war with the empire. If the contention should reach England, and it was possible, it would be important, if not necessary, for the king's free action, to have the archbishop with him. The Archbishop of Canterbury held an independent position, which made him a formidable power, to be taken account of even by the king.

An archbishop in opposition would be troublesome, and might be dangerous. Former archbishops had sometimes been both troublesome and dangerous; but, with one or two exceptions, they had all been monks. Thomas was no more a monk than he was a priest. His whole life past was far removed from either. Certainly he was no monk: his manner of life was the reverse of monkish.

Not only was he neither priest nor monk; he was wanting in what Churchmen required of all men—a due regard and veneration for the authority of the Church. His temper was secular, not ecclesiastical. He had shown, on several occasions, a carelessness of Church interests which had offended Theobald. The king could, therefore, count upon his support, under any apprehension of papal

aggression or encroachment. For the moment, the papacy was weak and divided ; and Pope Alexander was more likely to be a solicitor for Henry's help and support, than an aggressor upon his royal rights : but that was a condition of things not likely to last long.

There were also causes nearer home, urgent, in the king's view, for having a pliant archbishop. With Thomas for chancellor, he had sometimes issued his arbitrary commands, touching the lives and property of his subjects, without taking counsel with anybody. When he called a council, it might be a junto of lords selected by him, as it was at Colchester. But the archbishop, of necessity, was one ; and he led the bishops. When they met, the king would hear their opinions, but reserved the decision to himself, although it was called the resolution "of the king and council." Becket had gone decidedly with him and for the Abbot of Battle, whose case was good, yet he winced under tyranny in the mode of procedure. Writing, years afterwards, to the pope, he says of the decision concerning Battle Abbey, "It was so resolved by the king and his council, but the council did not dare to contradict his will on any point." *

To be absolute master of the kingdom, there remained one step to be taken, which no king had

His chief motive.

* Letter dcxliii. His personal feeling of tyranny mingles with his politic endeavour to have the pope's assistance.

yet achieved. He must have the Archbishop of Canterbury among his servants, as the chancellor was.

The people of the realm had long since lost all control over their own affairs. They threw it away, long before the Norman Conquest.

The Conquest, when it gave the spoils of England to the conquerors, gave a despotic authority to their captain. The lords of all the lands of the kingdom, under constant apprehension, as De Luci has told us, of the plots of the English, had generally consulted for their common safety by submissive concert with their leader, and had been themselves the sufferers, when they attempted to break loose.

The personal authority of the king was much strengthened by the reaction from the anarchy of Stephen's reign. The lords rushed into slavery. They cringed to Henry as they had not done even to his Norman ancestors. We shall come upon abundant evidence of this fact. At least they had chafed with rage, and meditated revolt, under the boisterous mandates of the first Henry. In the great councils, so-called (for the name of council remained), of the second Henry, we shall see that the lords of England gave their assent, in pitiful subservience or coarse applause, to every royal mandate. Not a man, save one, was left among them, who could dare to utter an opinion

of his own, and to persist in it, against the royal will.

Save one, and him the archbishop and primate of the Church.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, from the earliest times, and whatever might be the method of his promotion, was universally accredited with an authority not derived from the king, and not dependent upon him. As head of the Church, it was both his right and his duty—and the nation acknowledged the one and expected the other—to stand always for truth and right, as a servant of God, in the royal councils. In all the troubles and changes of the past, he had never yielded the right and had never lost it.

Independence of the archbishop's position.

Consequently, to set the key-stone to his despotism, to bring the kingdom under complete subervience to his will, the king must have an archbishop who will be his servant—an archbishop after the model of Thomas the chancellor. Thomas he could have ; but Thomas the chancellor, no ! Thomas Becket was far above that.

Henry wishes to repress it.

Henry knew well that the Primate of England had never been the king's servant as the chancellor was. Bishops had been kings' chancellors, but no archbishop had held the office. He held a higher commission than of the king ; he had always claimed this, and all men acknowledged it. Henry knew, or ought to have known, that an archbishop

who would be his servant in all things, as his chancellor was, would degrade his office, and would trample on every sacred duty. And he thought that Becket was capable of doing this, and selected him for the successor of Theobald, because he believed it and expected it.

His knowledge of the man, with whose services for seven years he had been so well satisfied, was very superficial. He could not have had much insight into character. There were others who saw further into the mind of Thomas: it was said that the king's mother, the empress, did, and that she cautioned him. But he had resolved: it was his will.

Becket's
motives

It is not difficult, from what we know of the two men, to read some of the feelings of Thomas also when he heard of the royal decision, although not so fully as we can the king's. He knew much more of the man Henry than Henry knew of him. Long and often he had looked him through. He knew quite well why he was designated for archbishop; he knew what he was expected to do and to be; and he could hardly feel himself honoured by the proposal. Still, the motives to it were no reason for his refusal of the office, if he could accept it with honour to himself, and hold it with usefulness to the people of the realm.

It may be a question also, whether an absolute refusal might not have been a resistance of the royal will, which would have been resented.

In looking forward to the probable results of his promotion, he could not lose sight of Henry's despotic instincts and his utter disregard of both law and reason when he was in his fits of rage. Royal acts of violence against person and property, which, as chancellor, he had striven, by persuasion or by stratagem, successfully or without success, to hinder and counteract, were sure to break out again when he should sit in council as archbishop, and would be the only man there who was bound to withstand them. As chancellor, if he strove and failed, he had done his duty, and he had done his best. It became his wisdom and his duty to be silent.

and prospects in the office.

But if he sat in council as archbishop his meridian of duty would be altered. Royal outrages against law he must then resist with all the authority of his office, and all the influence of the Church. In the sight of wrong to the weak subject, he could not sit in a silence which would be interpreted as consent to it, or concurrence in it. He must oppose it with all his might, although it were almost to resist a madman armed with despotic authority.

Could he fail, even thus early, to foresee that to be consecrated archbishop would be the sacrifice of all the world could give him, for a life of miserable contention? He knew that, if strife arose, and arise it must, Henry was a man who could never

H

yield to opposition—could never allow it to be said that he had given in.

Whether, with these thoughts, which could not escape him, he was moved by any ambition for the high dignity; whether he was eager to gain the higher dignity of personal freedom, and to throw off his subservience to such a master, which must often have stung him to the quick; whether to be lord of himself was not more to him than many landed lordships; whether he sought, at this time, to do some work of God for men, rather than possess all that man could give him for himself—these *are* questions between him and God, and we cannot answer them.

But thus far it is certain. Although, as yet, he might not anticipate the lengths to which the king would be carried against an unyielding resistance, yet he could expect nothing better, as archbishop, than the troubles and exile which had fallen to other archbishops when they came into collision with the royal pleasure.

His efforts
to avoid the
promotion.

Whatever his feelings were when he learnt the king's determination, we know something of his acts. He called attention to his lay habiliments. "A strange man, truly," he said, "you have chosen for your archbishop: do I look like an archbishop?" If it was a question of dress, the answer was apposite:—"It is easy to change your dress, and look like an archbishop." More than this:

he plainly cautioned the king that his promotion would put an end to their friendship, and make them enemies. He knew, he said, that the king would make demands to which, as archbishop, he could not consent. Already in Church affairs the king had shown a disposition to measures which he could never submit to.* He avowed his fear that, if he became archbishop, he must either sin against God or give offence to the king.

If this account of what he said may be exactly relied on (and it will have confirmation), it would appear that he had already disapproved of some projects affecting the Church, and therefore, as they were not pressed, had most likely averted them. At all events, his objection to them had been no secret.

His remonstrances had no effect: he was to be the new primate. The fact is, the chancellor had managed the king too well. He had allowed him to believe that he was managing the chancellor; and Henry had such confidence in himself, that he felt sure of holding him under his hand as archbishop. He was confident that Becket was the man he wanted; and, with utter disregard of the highest interests of his people, and of the outraged feelings of all classes of them, he resolved that the monks of Christ Church should elect him, and the bishops confirm the election.

* *Herb. Bos.*, iii. 1.

He thought he had the one man of all England, who would work with him and under him: he had one of few who would have resisted him perhaps the only one who could do it effectually.

Having said all that honour and duty called for, Thomas awaited the event in silence. It may have helped him to a decision, that he would enter upon the office with the approbation of the highest authority of "the Church." A pope's legate, Cardinal Henry of Pisa, who had known him at Rome, urged him to comply with the king's wishes, and to accept the promotion. He was believed, in fact, to have persuaded him, when he shrunk from it.

Royal
mission to
Canterbury.

The king was abroad during the vacancy of the see, which had lasted a little more than twelve months, when a royal commission, consisting of De Luci the justiciar, three bishops, and the Abbot of Battle, arrived at Canterbury. Their purpose was to secure the canonical election of the king's nominee, which, by ancient custom, rested with the prior and monks of the cathedral. The archbishop was their abbot, and the king could not appoint abbot or archbishop without their concurrence. It was necessary either to persuade them or to coerce them. More recently, the bishops of the province had claimed a voice in the appointment; and their claim helped the king and was encouraged. Bishops were apt to be more compliant than monks; and, at any rate, in a case

Not

of obstinacy, he could play off the one against the other.

The commission summoned the monks to assemble in their chapter-house, where De Luci, as spokesman, made known to them the royal condescension. "The sheep of the Church must no longer be endangered by lack of a pastor. The king acknowledged and conceded to them their full and entire freedom of election; but on condition that they elected a worthy and competent man, one who would be at unity with him. *That*, above all things, was important. They knew well that the king's first desire in the matter was the honour of God, and the advantage of holy Church. What mischiefs might arise to souls, what public troubles, what loss of goods (he meant worldly goods) to themselves, if the king and the archbishop should be at strife!"

Dealings
with the
monks of
Christ
Church.

Cogent argument from both worlds!

The prior withdrew to consult with his elder brethren, and they prudently resolved that it was important, first of all, to learn the king's wishes; and that, for this purpose, they must consult his commissioners. Enlightened upon the royal pleasure, they invoked the Holy Spirit of God to guide their deliberations, and declared themselves moved by that Divine influence to elect the king's chancellor, Thomas, to be their abbot and archbishop. Some of them, for a time, were otherwise moved.

Action of
the prior
and monks.

To elect a secular and a king's minister to the primacy was going beyond the accustomed rules of the comedy. But the malcontents were silenced, by some means ; and the chapter declared itself unanimous.

And of the
bishops.

The convent gained to this outrage on reason and conscience, this ancient and venerable hypocrisy, the commissioners proceeded to obtain the concurrence of the bishops. For this purpose they summoned the prior and his brethren to London, to a council of all the bishops and abbots of the kingdom, with the earls and barons and king's officials. They attended ; and the prior declared before the assembly that, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he and his monks had elected Thomas the chancellor to be archbishop. The commissioners bore witness to the election, and praised the virtues of the archbishop-elect. All concurred, with joyful thanks to God, except one dissentient, Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of Hereford, who made unreasonable objection, and inconveniently declared the real source of the inspiration. "The king," he mockingly said, "has done a marvellous thing ; he has converted a secular and a soldier into an archbishop." He had to be silenced ; and it was not done without a threat of exile to himself and all his relations. "The lion hath roared, who will not fear ?" That was his own excuse. Two years and a little more, and Foliot will be angry with

the man he despises, because he hears the lion roar more loudly, and is not afraid.

Gilbert Foliot will come back many times in our narrative. A foreigner, originally a monk of Cluny, he was highly esteemed by his own fraternity, for his learning and conduct, both as abbot and bishop; and for his ascetic life, for he abstained from both wine and flesh. He was also the king's confessor, by special appointment of the pope. Beyond his fraternity, the opinions of him were various. The Icelandic historian of Becket writes of Foliot: "He was a man of high kin, and a great clerk, keen of speech, but of middling uprightness in his dealings." Constrained by fear, he went over to the majority, and to the master, and had the reward of men who know when to bow. The next year, we find the king, the archbishop, and the pope, all desiring him, by their letters, to be translated from Hereford to the important see of London.*

Henry, the king's son, was present at this council. He had been called the young king, since he received the homage of the barons. Bishop Henry of Winchester made demand, before him and the council, that the new archbishop should enter upon his office, acquitted of all secular obligations, not liable to be called to account for moneys that had passed through his hands as chancellor, but absolutely free to employ the fruits of his new

* Letters xvi. - xviii.

Full discharge of all claims upon the new archbishop.

office, in the discharge of its duties.* If any accounts were to be called for, let them be called for now : if there was anything against him, or suspicion of anything, now was the time. He appealed to the young king.

There was nothing. Now and for ever he was acquitted in full of all obligations, on the word of a king. It was so declared by king's officers ; for the father had sent his word in writing, that whatever was done in his son's presence he would confirm. A discharge of this kind was nothing unusual. The head of a religious house could not be promoted to another without it : and for obvious reasons.

Thomas, then, was to be archbishop. It was already an event in the history of England. If he was not an Englishman by extraction, he was the first by birth, since the Norman Conquest, to ascend the primate's throne.

Ordained priest, 1162.

He was ordained priest in Rochester Cathedral on Friday, 1st of June ; and, the day following, he arrived at Canterbury, attended by a great company of monks and clergy, and was met by a crowd of bishops, abbots, and nobles, amidst the joyful shouts of an innumerable concourse of people.

Consecrated bishop.

On the Sunday, they conducted him to the cathedral, where, amid public rejoicings, with tears, and not of joy, he knelt under the hands of the

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 25 ; Grim, c. 16 ; Rog. Pont., c. 20.

Bishop of Winchester, and was consecrated a bishop. The young king Henry and the justiciar De Luci were present. It was the octave of Whitsunday, and the Church of England celebrates his consecration to this day, without intending it ; for the festival of Trinity Sunday, in the English calendar, was of his institution.*

Messengers were despatched to the pope, Alexander III., then in exile at Montpelier, and they brought back his confirmation of the election and the customary pall.

The contemporary biographers dwell, with eagerness, on what they call the change in his manner of life after his consecration. They are perfectly honest : none the less so because they seldom look beneath the surface. Yet they can tell us of no real change, except in outward things, of as little importance as a change of dress. We have stories of flagellations and hair shirts, and even incredible tales of dirt and vermin. We see there is some truth in ascetic practices, strange to our age, believed in that, to be conducive to the holy life of individual souls. With such things history has nothing to do. They may be dismissed with the endless tales of miracles, which some of the biographers gathered and recorded and believed. We must either pass over tales of wonders and miracles, while we receive the narratives of ordinary

Reputed
change of
life.

* Gervase, i. 171.

facts by the same writers, or we must throw aside their writings altogether; and then the history of England, for centuries, becomes a blank. We know nothing of it, but from monks, all of them superstitious; who more or less interlard their records of events with incredible tales and wonders. In most cases, we have little difficulty in winnowing off the light fable from the more solid fact.

Superficial. That the stories of change in his manner of life, when he became archbishop, do not signify very much, is confirmed by such incidental admissions, as that even the outward change of dress,* which custom required, was not accomplished without the remonstrances of friends, and from apologies for his omission to say Mass every day.† Whatever may be thought of the stories of his hair shirts, it can hardly be doubtful that the monks were offended to see him, when archbishop, attending the services of the Church in a secular dress.‡

A careful attention to the various narratives tends to the inference, counter to some vague assertions, that there was no material change, either in the man or in any professions or pretensions. Thomas the archbishop was the same essentially with Thomas the chancellor, Thomas the secretary, Thomas the clerk of accounts, Thomas the London boy.

We have accounts of his blameless life from his

* Rog. Pont., c. 24.

† Herb. Bos., ili. 13.

‡ Grim, c. 17.

youth which are credible, because we find no breath from enemies of any imputation to the contrary. In his private life, there was no change; because there was need of none. In his early days, he was not driven into vice by the jeers of companions in the schools of Paris; and, when he was chancellor, he would take part with the king in horse-play, but eluded his attempts to trick him into a participation in his own loose habits.*

As archbishop and as chancellor, all accounts agree that he was a strict and righteous administrator of justice. They tell us, what we expect from his life and character, that in his courts justice was not to be bought with money, and was not perverted by gifts.† No officer under him took gifts. And that was some ages before it was prohibited in the king's courts to take money from suitors. In this reign, and in others before and after it, it was the first purpose of the royal courts to make money by the administration of justice.‡ It was the anxious care of the king, and the manifest purpose of rigorous laws and ordinances, to secure all the money to himself, and not to have it shared with him by archdeacons, sheriffs, or other officers.

In things
important
no change.

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 11.

† Herb. Bos., iii. 14.

‡ Some years after this was written, the writer was surprised by a passage to the same effect in Dr. Stubbs's Constitutional History, i. 387: "Under the Norman kings, it was mainly for the sake of the profits that justice was administered at all." A gleam of latent history in a footnote, and not the only one!

The influence of powerful men had no more weight in the courts of Becket, chancellor or archbishop, than the money of suitors. "Against the injustice and insolence of the powerful he was an impregnable tower. No prayers or letters of the king could draw him to show favour against justice."* In that regard, he was, what he had always been, a righteous man, although not exactly according to the accepted standards. There was always something out of the common way in his religion and manner of life, as they appeared to his intimate friends. They fail to find in him the saintly characteristics they look for. They speak of his piety as of the rational and useful kind. "Reason was his guiding queen."† "Under the guidance of reason, he was virtuous." So writes his biographer, who knew him best; and he adds, "His chief virtues were prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance." He tells us also, what we are so often told of him, "He was a comforter of the oppressed, a husband of widows, a protector of orphans." "His archbishop's house had food for the homeless and poor, and winter garments for many. He took delight in visiting and conversing with his sick monks."

He is the reputed saint of the Roman Church; and we find that his ideal of the Christian religion and his practice of it were not those of Latin

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 28.

† *Ibid.*

Christianity. They are not shown in observances of ceremony or ritualism, in priestly authority, or in forms of belief. They are more after the teaching and example of the Author of the Christian religion Himself. They look for the higher life to come, through the melioration of things on earth.

It was not long before the archbishop found himself involved in dissensions with the king, as he had foreseen and foretold. They arose, as was to be expected, on questions of purely secular interest.

His first
measures as
archbishop.

During the hundred years since the Conquest, during the years of regulated plunder, still more during the later years of riot, the churches had been despoiled by powerful neighbours, although they suffered lightly compared with the old land-owners. The church of Canterbury was no exception. In the early inquiries into its possessions, which, in duty to the see and in prudence for himself every new incumbent is bound to make, Thomas found upon his entry that lands and lordships had been alienated from it, partly by violence, partly by wrongful grant. It was an acknowledged right, and would in many cases be a duty, to reclaim the lost estates; and he had asked and obtained the king's consent to the proceedings, more onerous than pleasant, which might be necessary. There was nothing singular in his conduct. The king had rescinded the grants of his

predecessor. The abbot of Battle reclaimed and recovered in this reign lands and churches of his abbey, which had been taken from it during the troubled times before; and, there can be little doubt, similar claims were enforced all over the kingdom. We should never have heard of any such claims of the archbishop, if there had been no subsequent quarrel with the king.

Besides these facts, which prejudice has too much overlooked, it may almost be taken for granted that a man like Becket would have a purpose in such proceedings, beyond the particular aggressions upon his church. The ruin of the English people was the fruit of ages of encroachment by the strong upon the weak. Long before the Norman Conquest, by violent seizures and by the chicanery of "commendation" to one lord as the price of his protection against all others, the English lords had grown greater and greater, diminishing in numbers, while they added house to house, and field to field, vill to vill, and honour to honour. It might well appear to such a man, reared as he had been in times of violence, and prone as he was to instinctive anger at the crimes of the strong against the weak, that, if the authority of his high office was to be of any use to the people of England, it must be seen and felt as a power that could put a check upon the frauds and violence of the great.

Of the wisdom of his efforts in particular claims it would be difficult even at the time to speak with confidence ; it is impossible now. In such cases everything depends on circumstances known to few and soon forgotten. He gave offence, as was to be expected, both to usurping lords and to others who had cause for sympathy with them. It may appear, perhaps, that there was something unfortunate in some of his proceedings ; and he may have shown, he often did, a certain vehemence of temper, not saint-like, and not advantageous to his case in hand, which a less ardent nature would have controlled. He often put no curb upon what was either a very bold or a very ungovernable tongue.

The castle and honour of Tonbridge, which he claimed as belonging to the see of Canterbury, were held by Lord Clare, a man connected with most of the great families, and, what was more unfortunate, whose sister, said to be the most beautiful woman of the kingdom, had attracted the admiration of King Henry. The archbishop may have scorned to take account of such things, but they would have their weight when Lord Clare made his complaint to the king.

Claim to
Tonbridge.

Another complaint was made by William of Eynesford, lord of that manor. The archbishop appointed a parson of Eynesford, and William, claiming the right of presentation himself, drove

He excom-
municates
a king's
tenant.

out the archbishop's nominee and his people. The archbishop immediately excommunicated him, and in so doing trespassed beyond his lawful powers, according to the laws of the Norman kings; because William was a tenant-in-chief of the king who claimed a right of notice and consent to such excommunication.* He sent the archbishop his commands to give his tenant immediate absolution. Thomas replied that it did not appertain to the king to say whom he should either absolve or excommunicate; but when he heard that Henry was getting angry he did absolve the knight. Too late, however; Henry was heard to say that he owed him no thanks. It appears difficult in this case, according to the accounts we have, to defend the action of Becket as altogether prudent. But there is something to be said on the other side; and it is not easy to be confident in blaming him.

He forbids
a marriage
of the king's
brother.

Another offence, little known, it would appear, in England, is mentioned by some French writers. The king's brother, William, who was not, like Geoffrey, endowed by his father with any territories that Henry could covet for himself, and was in better favour with him, would have provided for himself by marrying the Countess of Warenne, a rich widow. Becket opposed the marriage, on the ground, it would appear, that they were too nearly

* *Diceto*, i. p. 312.

related, and it did not take place. It has been inferred that there was some enmity between William and the archbishop, and that the king was much offended ; but there is little evidence of either inference, none whatever that the offence was serious or lasting, or was at all likely to be.

Henry was in Normandy when he received the complaints of the archbishop's proceedings and, about the same time or perhaps sooner,* his resignation of the office of chancellor. This step was more likely than anything yet to try his patience. He neither wished nor expected it, and would have taken some trouble to hinder it. But the resignation came to him in a manner which gave him no opportunity of remonstrance. Thomas alleged, as his reason, that he was not equal to one of the offices, much less to both. The king showed his displeasure, but as yet there was no serious quarrel.

He resigns
the office of
chancellor.

Upon the complaints brought to him, one after another, he deferred consideration till his return to England, which took place soon after the Christmas following. Becket and his old pupil, the younger Henry, awaited him at Southampton, where they met, to all appearance, on their old familiar terms, although not without some signs of aggrieved royalty. Yet they went together to Canterbury, where the king was guest, and their prolonged

* Diceto, i. p. 307.

conversations seemed to show that their friendship was as yet unbroken. It was evident that Henry was willing to bear with much from Thomas in his contentions with others, as long as he did not come into direct antagonism with himself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROYAL TYRANNY THWARTED AT WOOD-
STOCK AND WESTMINSTER.

UP to this time, with the exception of pope and kings, no man in Europe stood higher than Archbishop Thomas. He crossed the sea, nearly twelve months after his consecration, to attend the Council of Tours, convened by Pope Alexander. In his route he was received everywhere with royal honours. The king spent some days with him at his manor of Romney, while he waited the wind. The Earl of Flanders came to meet him at Gravelines, where he landed. The Flemish nobles, the lords of Normandy and Maine, vied with one another in attendance upon him as he passed by. On his approach to Tours, a few days before the opening of the Council, the assembled ecclesiastics and the population of the city poured forth to meet him. Even the cardinals went with the crowd, leaving only two of their college with the pope. The pope himself, who rose from his chair only to

Becket's
great posi-
tion.

His recep-
tion by the
pope at
Tours,
1163.

royal persons, advanced to receive him in his chamber. We have the account from one of his attendants, his chaplain Herbert, of whom we shall hear again.

No doubt the honours paid him were a recognition of the importance of the King of England, in his support of Alexander against the anti-pope. There and everywhere they were the highest honours that could be paid to a subject.

In short, he held the greatest position except the papacy attainable by any man in Europe, and was in possession of all that life could give him. Everything was his without fear of disturbance, if he kept the king's grace. That is a condition which galls few men even now. After some signs of displeasure on matters of difference, the king had still shown, not only his consent, but even his anxiety that their old friendly relations should be maintained.

His sudden
"fall."

Yet within a few months his greatness and all his wealth had vanished. The king's intimate companion, who by the royal self-will, in defiance of the public feeling, in disregard of the public welfare, had been forced upon the nation for its archbishop, was denounced to all the world as the king's enemy and a traitor, and was an exile, with a crowd of fellow-exiles, in a foreign land, dependent upon the charity of foreigners for their bread.

What was the cause of the sudden change? of what is commonly called, "a fall" so strange?

One might have conjectured that Archbishop Thomas must have given offence in some mighty business of state, or moved the king's jealousy by his splendid reception at Tours and on his way. But there is no ground for any suspicion of the kind, and nothing in the king's conduct to suggest it.

The causes of rupture were of a much humbler kind, quite in keeping with all we know of the two men, and quite sufficient for everything that ensued. They broke out at what has been called the Council of Woodstock.

It had become a custom for lords of estates to pay to the sheriffs of their counties a yearly cess of two shillings on every hide of their land. What the payment was for has been a question of some difficulty; the best account of it is to be gathered from the biographies of Becket. That it was universally regarded as a voluntary payment, does not admit of question. The sheriffs collected certain royal revenues, with large discretionary powers. Some of these consisted of fines incurred by various offences, not only of any lord of lands, but also of his servants or villagers. If one of these cut firewood in his master's domain, upon land within the king's forest laws, and without the supervision of a royal forester, his lord was subject to a heavy fine.

The cause
of it.

The sheriffs'
hidage
money.

For the hidage money of two shillings, the sheriffs, we are told, indemnified the lords against fines incurred by their dependents. It appears also, under the form of a compensation to those officers for their public services, to have been, in fact, an acknowledgement that they had used their powers with moderation. It was thus a sort of mutual insurance, both against the faults of the villagers, and against undue severities of the sheriffs. Any lord dissatisfied with the sheriff's conduct might refuse to pay his hidage money.

"Council
of Wood-
stock,
1163.

This cess had fallen under the eye of the king. While he computed how much two shillings a hide from all the lands of the kingdom would add to the revenues of his exchequer, he could not fail to see that such a payment to the sheriffs must tend to diminish them. The result was that, at a Council held at Woodstock, he declared his intention, and expected it to pass unquestioned, to have the two shillings a hide paid into the exchequer as royal revenue, and no longer to the sheriffs.*

Upon this, as on other occasions, Henry's action has the good fortune of being directed against a custom which can hardly be reconciled with good government. But it was a custom, good or bad in itself, useful, however, under the circumstances of his age, and so regarded by his contemporaries.

* Rog. Pont., c. 26; Grim, c. 23.

And in this, as we shall see in most or all other of what some writers have called his reforms, the immediate effect, and sometimes the avowed purpose of his action, was to increase his own revenues at the expense of other people. On this also, as on other occasions, whatever question may arise as to the value of his desired change, there can be none as to the manner in which he sought to carry it out. At Woodstock, the Council were addressed as the mere registrars of his will.

They felt themselves the victims of a flagrant act of tyranny. Bishops and barons, alarmed at the threatened conversion of a voluntary gift into an oppressive tax, heard in silent amazement. Every member of the Council had the right and the power to speak out. All were silent, till the one man spoke, who, with the right of a councillor, was also under the duty to speak with the authority of the archbishop, and felt himself obliged to say, No! What we are told of his feelings is perfectly credible, and is what we should expect of him. "He was anxious that public wrong should not be done through his silence." He answered temperately, explaining the nature of the payment, and argued that a voluntary gift to the sheriffs ought not to go into the royal revenue as a compulsory tax.

The arch-
bishop
resists him.

The king was presently in one of his storms of wrath, and swore by his customary oath that the

Hot word

money should be reckoned for in his exchequer. The archbishop then answered more decidedly ; whether in anger or considerately, it is not easy to say. His words have an angry sound, and he may have spoken with heat, and still not without consideration : "By the reverence due, my lord and king, to the eyes by which you have sworn, the money shall not be paid of land of mine, nor one penny of it from any possession of the Church."

in season.

That answer, in its bold defiance, from a man whose first duty it was to be an example of humility, was the answer which the times required. It was that, whatever his ruling motive was. For all things there is a season. It was the trumpet-blast to the enchanted castle, beneath which all else were dumb. If anybody but a priest had spoken it, David Hume and the writers of history after him would never have wearied of their praises. It was the first resistance of arbitrary taxation, the first clarion note of English freedom since the foreign Conquest. The spirit which dictated it awakened a national spirit. It led to Runnymede, and many like things to follow.

In whatever temper the words were spoken ; even if in heat, if they were the outbreak of long-pent indignation under royal paroxysms, it is not easy to say that they were in fault. They showed a determination for active resistance, if it were necessary ; and they were successful for their end.

The impost never came into the exchequer, and there can be no doubt that these words hindered it.

But if the king did not sweep the hidage into his own net, there is reason for doubting whether it continued to be paid to the sheriffs. The alarm would be likely to put an end to it, and an effective restraint upon their arbitrary powers would be lost. We have here, perhaps, an explanation of the loud and general complaints of sheriffs' extortions which ensued, and in 1170, upon the king's return to England after an absence of four years, resulted in the "Inquest of Sheriffs."

We shall come back to this; we are now at Woodstock. The bold answer of the archbishop silenced the royal demand. Henry was struck dumb by a resistance so unlooked for and so unexampled. But he was not a man to sit down Retaliation foiled. Beaten in one direction, he could double in pursuit of his game. The powers of the primate had curbed the royal power. The prelate's power must be abated.

That was the view of the king's subsequent conduct taken by the archbishop and his friends. The recorded facts bear out their opinion, and will show that it was substantially the true one.

It happened about the same time as the proceedings at Woodstock, that a canon of Bedford, Philip de Broi by name, was tried in the court of the Bishop of Lincoln for the manslaughter of a knight. by the case
of De Broi.

It had been found that there was no evidence ; and De Broi purged himself of the charge by his oath, as in such a case he had by custom a right to do. The dead man's relatives were satisfied, and, by all known law and usage, the case was at an end.

To a prisoner tried, acquitted, and discharged, according to all the forms and customs of existing law, nothing could be more unexpected than a notice that he would be tried over again. Such a notice was now served on De Broi.* He was summoned by the sheriff of Bedford to appear before the king's justices itinerant. A summons so irregular could hardly have issued without assurance that the king would maintain it, if, under all the circumstances, we may not infer that it went with his knowledge or by his command. De Broi appeared, however, at Dunstable, and, naturally enough, allowed himself to use insulting language to the sheriff. That he did so tells for something in the case. He could hardly have so ventured, if he had not felt himself safe by all known rule. His words were reported to the king, who took them as an insult to himself, and angrily gave his orders that a new trial in his court should proceed.

The arch-
bishop re-
sists again.

The archbishop once more stood forth against him, and in defence of the law. The royal command was not a mere infringement of Church

* Rog. Pont., c. 27.

canons ; it was a violation of laws and customs of the realm, long established and observed.

That the king's contention was a bad one, is certain from the fact that a middle course was adopted, and that he reluctantly consented to it. It was compromised, that a special court of bishops and barons should be convened at Canterbury, under the presidency of the archbishop, to investigate the charges against the canon.

De Broi appeared again, and was again acquitted of the main charge. He admitted his offensive language to the sheriff, pleaded anger and expressed his regret.

The king, in his angry moments, lost all sense of dignity or generosity. He rejected the apology, and insisted on the canon's punishment for the offence he had acknowledged. The court complied with his demand, and sentenced De Broi to two years' banishment, and sequestration of his canonry to the king. It would appear by one account that he was flogged ; but, comparing it with another, it is possible that he only underwent the shame of presenting his bared back to the executioner.

It was an arbitrary sentence, passed without law, to propitiate the royal wrath. The writer who says "it was adopted with the view of pacifying the king," gives the only possible explanation of it ; and therefore Becket, at this point, went to

Com-
promise.

Arbitrary
sentence "to
pacify the
king."

the verge of right and justice, or beyond it, in his desire "to pacify the king." He may have been overruled, but the sentence could hardly have passed without his consent.

De Broi, however, had learnt by this time how the land lay, and was as glad as the king was angry that he had escaped with his life.

Nor was this the only case of the kind. In some others, about the same time, clerical offenders were unlawfully branded, or otherwise punished beyond law, "to appease the king."

Synod at
West-
minster,
October 1,
1163.

It was at this conjuncture that a synod of bishops and clergy met at Westminster, not many weeks after the Council of Woodstock.

It was called ostensibly to settle a dispute—it was an old one—between the two archbishops. It was no sooner known that he of Canterbury was at feud with the king, than he found himself the mark of many assailants.*

Worries of
the arch-
bishop.

Roger of York revived an old claim of the northern archbishops, to have their crosier borne before them in the province of Canterbury. It was a claim of equality with the other archbishop, made of much account then, petty enough to readers of it now.

Bishop Foliot, lately translated from Hereford to London, refused to make new profession of obedience to the archbishop, on the pretext that

* Letters xxvi., xxix., xxxvi.

he had made it already at Hereford, and that another profession was unnecessary. The archbishop saw, in this refusal, a disposition to throw off the obedience of the Church of London to that of Canterbury, and it turned out afterwards that he was right.

Clarembald, abbot-elect of St. Augustine's, Canterbury—for there were two abbeys there, and we see the remains of them still, among modern survivals and revivals—refused to make his profession of obedience, unless the archbishop came to St. Augustine's to receive it.

All these questions worried him, as they were intended to do, by contention at home, and by appeals to the pope. There were appeals on all of them, and they were not the only causes of anxiety to him.

The synod of 1163 at Westminster was summoned upon the first of these questions,—the jurisdiction of the two archbishops. The king was present, and surprised the prelates before they had touched upon the expected business, by complaints of the archdeacons and their courts, and particularly of their punishing offences by fines.*

The question was not a new one. It had been raised in a case tried at York before the king and some prelates, in the time of Theobald. A dean had exacted a fine in punishment of some offence,

* MS., Lambeth, c. 12.

and the king made strong objection to the practice. The deans and archdeacons, he said, obtained in this way, and expended in luxurious living, more than came into his own exchequer.* The dean was sentenced to pay back the fine, and to be at the archbishop's mercy.

"And what," said De Luci, "do you adjudge to the king, whose constitution he has transgressed?"

"Nothing," was the answer, "because the offender is a cleric."

"To that decision," De Luci answered, "I shall not give my consent. He has committed an offence against the king, and must pay a fine."

Nobody, therefore, was to take money in a court of justice except the king. To him it was the ordinary practice, and his first recorded complaint of the clerical courts is upon a claim for a fine.

Thus, at the opening of the great controversy, his motives and purpose are avowed. It is not the reform of any grievance; it is not uniformity of law. It is to gain money by the administration of justice, and to hinder all others from intercepting it.

Failing, at York, to obtain a fine, he insisted that the case should be heard again by the archbishop; but he was called abroad immediately after by the death of his brother Geoffrey, and, it was thought, forgot the matter. Probably there was some better

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 33.

cause for its postponement. At all events, it was not forgotten. It was now taken up at Westminster, and was carried further. 1163.

From his complaint of the archdeacons, the king went on to speak of breaches of the peace and crimes of the clerical people ; and, declaring his resolve to maintain order in his kingdom, he desired that clerics, convicted in the bishops' courts of grave offence against his laws, should be, there and then, degraded from their orders and handed over to the officers of the royal courts, to be punished like other people. He desired also that a king's officer should be present at the degradation, to take the culprit into custody before he could escape.

The king complains of clerical criminals,

To modern eyes, nothing could appear more reasonable ; although the demand was without example in the history of the English people in times past. It was a demand for the enactment of a law at variance with all previous custom. The king requested the assent of the archbishop and his prelates to his proposal : their assent would have sufficed ; and it was necessary, according to the customs of the realm, or it would not have been asked.

and proposes a new law,

The archbishop made strenuous opposition. In a sermon lately preached, he had dwelt at some length upon laws Divine and laws human, with their distinct jurisdictions and different punish-

ments—their “two swords.” He now made earnest appeal to the ecclesiastical prejudices of the bishops, who were as unwilling as the lay lords were, to resist the violence of the royal will. In private conference, he found them inclined to yield. They talked of life and ease, and the depravity of the times. He argued that it was in times of depravity, not in times of ease and peace, that they were called upon to contend, and that the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep. He called God to witness, that he believed it unsafe to *give up “the form of government which they had received from their fathers.”*

which is rejected by the estate, whose assent was necessary and was therefore desired.

His great personal influence prevailed. By arguments suitable to them, and by his persuasive eloquence, he so turned the minds of the bishops that he was able to report their unanimous refusal to consent to the desired change of the law.

New method of law-making.

Henry raged and swore, after his wont. Foiled once more, he again took a new departure. He curtly demanded whether the bishops intended to observe, in all things, the constitutions and customs of the kings before him. The archbishop again answered for all: “Certainly we will, in all things, saving our own order.”

This saving clause was nothing new. It was a customary reservation in bishops’ oaths of allegiance, and, in any ordinary circumstances, would have passed unnoticed. But Henry had resolved

to be absolute master of the archbishop and clergy, and would brook no word of reservation. Mad with fury, and with his usual oath, "I will have no mention," he said, "of your order; it is cap-tious. My customs you shall allow and confirm, absolutely and without reserve." The contention was prolonged: "he was angry all day:" but the bishops were firm; and, at last, he abruptly took his departure, uttering fierce words and loud threats, and left London the next morning at daybreak.

It has been a common understanding of this dispute, that the king contended for a beneficial amendment of the law; and that Becket, converted since his promotion, into a Church partisan, and obstinate in defence of Church privileges, was an obstacle to reform.

Erroneous
ideas of the
points at
issue,

Both inferences are in error. The king had no view of any changes beneficial to the nation, which could properly be called reform; and the arch-bishop's aim and purpose were not to maintain Church privileges, although, secondarily and in-cidentally, this was the effect of his contention.

His great purpose, in the long contest which followed, is to be fully ascertained upon the whole view of it. That it was no narrow zeal for Church privileges is already evident.

The question concerning the clerical courts and their powers had been raised, we have seen, by

K

De Luci at York, and allowed to sleep. This most likely was what Thomas alluded to, when, upon being named for archbishop, he reminded the king that there had been a difference between them concerning the Church, in which he could never yield his consent.

both as to
motives,

After their intimate relations during some years, the king could not be ignorant of his convictions upon any question of the kind. If this was the difference he called to mind, and events to follow will justify the inference, it would result that the question of clerical jurisdiction raised by De Luci, under no ardour for good laws, but with the avowed purpose of bringing in money, was not to have been revived if there had been no other difference ; and was now revived at Westminster, and afterwards, as we shall see, enlarged and impetuously urged, not for any beneficial purpose of reform, nor even for the lower purpose of money, but to humble the archbishop, and to provoke discord upon the very point which he had told the king he could never yield.

But whether or not, if this was not the question of which he reminded the king, yet this much is beyond controversy, that Thomas the chancellor had been in contention with the king upon some Church question, as Thomas the archbishop now was.

But the unclerical chancellor is not likely to

have taken the part he did, under any professional bias, as a deacon of the Church. It could only have been a question of right or wrong with him, or a question of sound policy or public utility.

The inference is reasonable. His conduct was governed by the same motives now as it had been before. He had not changed with change of circumstances, but new circumstances may have given force to old convictions. Under a pretext of law, he had seen a purpose of tyranny without restraint. He had found himself, as archbishop, the last remaining check upon violence and despotism. He had seen the want of a barrier against it in royal caprices of self-will, and in the cases of clerical offenders, branded and otherwise punished, under no law, but by arbitrary sentence, before the new law for them was even proposed. It was therefore of high importance to the public welfare that his office should be maintained in all its authority ; and, for this end, that the Church should retain its ancient rights and privileges. To degrade the Church was to degrade the head of it ; and the king saw this as well as he did.

The assertion of the biographer Grim is, therefore, justified ; the king, finding that the archbishop had the advantage of him upon the secular question of the hidage money, turned his fury upon the clergy, expecting, through them, to strike a blow at their head.

and as to the
new law
wanted.

So much for the motives and intentions of both parties. As regards the king's proposed new law : the change, if it had been his single purpose, would not have been beneficial to the nation in that age. The question, however, is not one to be viewed through the spectacles of modern times.

The clerical
people are
not the
clergy only.

The clergy, or clerical people of that time, cannot be identified with any class corresponding to the clergy of our own. Any of the people who had obtained a little education might be numbered among the clergy. A man who could read, or at least read and write, had no difficulty in obtaining admission to the clerical order. To hold for a time one of the numerous inferior offices of the Church, to take some minor part in the services of a monastic or parish church, conferred all the privileges of the clergy. Probably, in most places, the clergy included almost the whole of the limited middle class which then existed between the lords and the villagers. We should be much nearer to the truth if, by privileges of the clergy, we understood privileges of the educated people.

The ancient
laws.

The laws and customs of England, from time immemorial, long before the Norman Conquest, made a difference between laymen and clerics accused of crime or misdemeanour. Till the time of the first Norman king, both were tried in the courts of the hundred ; but they were under different laws, and were subject to different punish-

ments. The Conqueror was the first to enact that the different modes of jurisdiction should have their separate courts. It is a law of his that a man, ^{Law of William}impleaded of any cause or fault under bishops' laws, should be tried, not in the court of his hundred, but in the bishop's court; and that no sheriff, judge, king's minister, or other layman, should intrude himself into questions of law appertaining to the jurisdiction of the bishop.

The consequent separation of the king's and ^{Its effect}bishops' courts had resulted, not without encroachment, in the trial of all offences of clerical people, and also of all offences against them, in the bishops' courts. If a clerical murderer escaped capital punishment, the murderer of a clerical person had the same immunity.

But for centuries before the Conquest, probably ^{Penalties under ancient laws.}since the age of Augustine, the punishments of clerical criminals had been different from those of laymen. For centuries the punishment of a priest for murder was degradation from his orders and banishment from the kingdom. There were also special laws for clerical people convicted of various offences. These laws are still on record, and are read by students of early English history.

In so far, then, as uniformity of law would have subjected all persons guilty of murder or other serious crime to the same severity of punishment, the proposed change of law might properly be

Norman
penal laws.

called a reform. But the change in view went far beyond this. The king's laws and courts inflicted punishments of savage severity upon small offences. Bodily mutilations were favourite punishments of the French kings, Norman and Angevin, and for very trifling offences. If an English peasant stole a goose from a field which had once belonged to his forefathers, he might have his eyes torn out, and was fortunate if he had only a hand or a foot lopped off. For a long time, to kill the king's game was a worse offence than to kill a man, and was more severely punished.

The bishops'
courts more
humane.

But these cruel punishments were seldom inflicted except upon men of the lowest classes. The rich man could generally compound for crime by a money payment, and the great lord could hinder punishment by force. The clerical people fell under the more humane penalties of the bishops' courts. A clerical culprit might be degraded from his orders, which would not protect him a second time ; he might be banished, or flogged, or sent to end his days under severe discipline in some monastery. But the bishops' courts shed no blood ; and, on this account, were as popular as the king's were odious. The mutilated wretches scattered over the country, for the purpose, as Norman French laws coolly stated it, " of striking terror," could not fail to excite hatred and disgust at the foreign masters of the land, and their laws and courts.

The authority of the bishops' courts extended also to all cases affecting the rights of widows and orphans; and this was another cause of their popularity.

The king and barons were known to the people as spoilers, tyrants, oppressors, boasting themselves foreigners; the king himself, a newly imported foreigner, with no interest in them but to suck their blood.

Popular ideas of the king and barons.

Most of the bishops also were foreigners. But the clerical people were, almost all of them, Englishmen. Their sympathies were English, and the sympathies of Englishmen were with them when the foreign king wanted to bring them all under his jurisdiction, and to lop off their limbs or scoop out their eyes as freely as he did those of the peasantry, or to extract money from them by court fees, and fines, and hush-money to save life or limb. Such money payments, impossible to poor serfs, might be looked for from clerical offenders.

Universal popular feeling concerning the proposed new law.

That among the large body of men who could claim clerical privileges many every year were guilty of offences great or small, is what we might expect. But the king's pictures of priestly delinquencies are very exaggerated. They get darker and darker as he gets more angry in the prolonged strife which follows. If clerical crime had been as rife as he often alleges, he would have begun his campaign, one must imagine, with a better case

than that of De Broi, who could not be convicted of crime, and could only be punished by exaggerating his indignant protests to the sheriff into a personal insult to the king.

Singular
interview of
the king and
archbishop.

There is a curious story that Henry, after the synod at Westminster,* desirous to try the effect of his personal influence, invited the archbishop to meet him at Northampton. The archbishop was arriving there with a great retinue of mounted attendants, when he received the royal command to remain outside the town, which was not large enough for two such companies, and the king would presently come out and confer with him where he was. They met, or would have met, but their fiery chargers made it impossible, and had to be changed for quieter beasts. When they were able to converse, the king upbraided the primate with his favours to him, and was answered in terms which provoked him to say that he had not sent for the archbishop to preach to him. The rebuff was followed by the question, intended to be insulting, whether Thomas was not the son of one of the king's vill-people. "It is true," he answered, quoting Horace, "that I had not kings for my grandfathers, but neither had St. Peter, the prince of the Apostles." "True," said the king, "but then he died for his Lord." "And I, also," he said, "shall die for my Lord, when the time comes." Such an

* Rog. Pont., c. 29.

interview left them, of course, on worse terms than before.

It is a remarkable conference between a king of England and an Archbishop of Canterbury—all the more so of an archbishop whom great historians describe as “a candidate for martyrdom.” Why, he avows it, in this very scene! A candidate for martyrdom, on his fiery charger, vying with the king on his! He has changed it, certainly, for a quiet beast. It is what, in his life’s work, to the end of it, he never did!

CHAPTER VIII.

LAW-MAKING UNDER TERROR, COMMONLY
CALLED THE COUNCIL OF CLARENDON.

THE troubles in England, when they reached the ears of Pope Alexander, gave him no small perplexity. An exile from Rome himself, he had already enough on his hands with the emperor and the antipope. It was important, if possible, to allay this new trouble with a king so powerful as Henry. With this view, he sent a Cistercian abbot, of high condition (his abbot almoner), with letters from himself and from some of the cardinals, and instructions to mediate and make peace, if possible, between the king and the primate. Thomas was urged by letter to order himself modestly and flexibly to the king's will. The prospects of the Church were overclouded by the schism, ecclesiastical severity would be impolitic.

The pope
interposes.

Advised that
the king's
only grievance
is his
wounded
dignity.

The papal messengers, after conference with the king, assured the archbishop that Henry had declared to them, on his oath, that he intended

nothing to the prejudice of the Church. He had felt aggrieved by the primate's public opposition to him, and wanted nothing more than to be honoured as a king by his formal and verbal submission. The royal pledge was made known to the pope, who urged the archbishop not to mistrust it, and took all responsibility upon himself. Thomas was obliged to yield to this advice ; but, knowing the king, as he did, it was not without misgivings.

He urges submission.

However, he went with the abbot to Woodstock, and gave the king his word, without any reservation, that he would observe the customs. The king replied, "You opposed me in public—you must submit in public." To secure his submission, and to publish it, and a code of "Constitutions" to be issued along with it as the customs of the realm, was to be the work of a "great council," summoned for this special purpose, which has been made famous in English history as "the Council of Clarendon."

Thomas submits in word, as required, but the king proceeds.

It was a great assembly of the high estates of the realm, spiritual and temporal, at the king's hunting-palace, at Clarendon, near Salisbury.* The lords who attended it must have sheltered themselves as they could, in tents pitched upon the borders of the forest.

January, 1164.

* W. Cant, i. 15 ; Grim, c. 28 ; Herb. Bos., iii. 28, 29 ; Rog. Pont., c. 33-36.

On the matter in question, as soon as it arose, the king came directly to the point: "Let the archbishop repeat his submission, as to the observance of my customs." Thomas, as may be imagined, had his fears for what might be coming, and answered more cautiously than was expected. He had already seen reason to apprehend that much more was to be required of him than the papal nuncio, upon the king's oath, had promised. He did not give the short, direct answer which was looked for, but entered upon some discussion of the matter in question.

The king
rages and
threatens.

This was not what the king intended. He expected a repetition in public of the short, direct form of submission which had been made to him in private. He not only became angry; he was very soon "mad with rage." His words and manner were those of an insensate, infuriate bully. He "would have recourse now, not to counsel, but to the sword. He had sworn to administer justice, and so he would. The archbishop protects homicides and thieves. But he would bend their necks. He would be another Saul to the Lord's priests, if his will were not instantly obeyed."

The lords
uproarious.

His anger seemed to be contagious. The assembly was in an uproar. The king's dependents hurried through the chambers with fierce anger in their faces, declaring themselves ready to commit any crime for their master. With their

Loud and
open threats.

cloaks flung off, and arms uplifted, brandishing their shining axes, a band of them came near the bishops, exclaiming, "Hear, ye that set at defiance the laws of the realm and the king's commands: these hands are not ours, they are the king's: our arms, our bodies are at his service, ready to do his will, be it what it may. Advise yourselves: turn your minds to the king's bidding: avoid danger while ye can."*

The bishops stood mute and trembling; the lower clergy slunk away in terror; the archbishop alone was calm, and pleasantly told his brethren that such things were what true priests should look for.

The bishops, although fearful, were not disposed to shrink from the position they had taken with him, upon the question of their own privileges. The Bishop of London, when contending some time afterwards with the king against the archbishop, boasted that at Clarendon he and the bishops had no fear, and were ready to suffer torture and death rather than surrender.

The tumult was at its height, when two of the bishops, Salisbury and Norwich, who lay under some old grudge with Henry, drew the archbishop aside and intreated him with tears to have pity on them. They had both of them had warning that they would be made the exemplary victims

Two bishops
threatened
with the
knife,

* Foliot's letter, ccxxv.

of the royal displeasure, and would suffer horribly in life or limb if he were not obeyed.*

* at the hands
of two great
earls.

After them, came two great earls, Leicester and Cornwall, the king's uncle, entreating the archbishop to have pity upon the two bishops and upon themselves. The king, they said, was terribly angry, and had given them orders to commit an unheard-of crime with their own hands; and it was impossible for them to disobey him. "The king and kingdom," they declared, "will be the laughing-stock of all peoples around, for a nation as destitute of council as it is of law."†

What was the crime they were to enact upon the two bishops, and, reluctant as they were, were ready to perpetrate under the royal orders—if, as most likely, it was told to the archbishop—was not divulged, and was left a mystery to times following.

Two
templars
promise
peace for a
word.

After the two earls, came two eminent knights templars, one of them the English master of the order, confirming the horrid tale he had heard already; but to assure him that the whole difference would be at an end if he would only give verbal satisfaction before the assembled council. He would gain peace and friendship by a word. Nothing was to be written down; there would be no record of his verbal submission. They pledged

* Rog. Pont., c. 34; W. Cant, i. 15; Grim, c. 29; Gervase, i. 177.

† Grim, c. 29.

themselves; they pledged their souls to damnation, if anything more was required of him.* It is a tale of the times, and there is no ground for distrust of it.

No point of Becket's conduct has given occasion to more controversy than this. The only intelligible account of it comes to us from his adversary Foliot, in a letter† which has been thought so incredible, that it has been much disputed whether it is genuine. The letter helps us to understand everything, and bears testimony to itself.

After these strange visits and revelations from the two bishops, the two earls, and the two templars, Thomas found himself in the predicament of the casuists, anxiously pondering the question whether, in any case, to prevent worse evil, a man may tell a lie. He could no longer give an honest assent, even verbally, to the alleged customs. By this time he had learnt enough of them to know that some of them were no customs of the realm, and some, as he believed, pernicious to the Church and people of England. He knew well that he could never honestly sanction them with his consent.

But he was also well acquainted with the son of Geoffrey of Anjou, and, we may be pretty sure, had heard him speak of his father's methods of dealing with refractory priests. At least, he could

* Rog. Pont., i. 35.

† Letter ccxxv.

Position
of the
archbishop.

judge, no man better, how far the son was capable of piously following his father's example. It was plain that he was willing to profit by it.

Was he at liberty, in such a case, to give the word the templars begged him to give, with the intention of breaking it? Was a lie permissible, for the sake of averting from the two bishops and the two earls, from the king himself, and from the kingdom, the atrocious crime immediately threatened? Anselm would not have done it; but Becket was no Anselm, and did not aspire to be. He was too great in himself to be an imitator of anybody. The old saints and martyrs of the Church would not have done it; but he was no candidate either for saintship or martyrdom. With a change of dress, he was still, what he had always been, a godly man, according to his light, but a statesman and a man of the world; with high political aims, and pursuing them by ways which have always, to most people, appeared strange and unaccountable; but yet were his ways, and were successful, although at the cost of his life.

To prevent
worse evil,

The contention was prolonged from day to day. It was the third day when Becket received these private communications. Perplexed and troubled, he had made up his mind what to do when he returned to the bishops; and it can hardly be surprising if there was something strange and awkward in his abrupt avowal, that he was about

to do the very thing which, with all his eloquence and earnestness, he had persuaded them must not be done. Foliot's report of his words may be quite accurate. "It is my lord's will," he said, "that I shall perjure myself; for the present, I yield. I will perjure myself, and hope for pardon by penitence hereafter." *

We can well believe that the bishops were as men struck dumb, and said the captain had deserted his army. We don't find, however, that the army mutinied. They were sooner persuaded to go with him and make their submission, than they had been to hold out and resist. He led them to the king.

He began with an apology for his scruples in a matter that concerned God and the Church. He now declared, with trust in the royal wisdom and clemency, "I consent to your demands, and give my word that I will observe the customs of the realm *bonâ fide*." he gives a feigned verbal submission.

It was to this extent that he gave his word.

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when the king followed with loud voice: "You have all heard how the archbishop has submitted; now let the bishops, upon his command, do the same."

They did so. Then he pursued: "I think you all understand that the archbishops and bishops have submitted to me, to observe in future the" The bishops follow.

* The same letter, ccxxv.

laws and customs of my kingdom. Now therefore, to prevent future contention, let the wiser and the elder of the nobles and clergy retire, and make record of the customs of my grandfather Henry, and with all speed bring them to me carefully written out."

The written
"customs."

It was soon done, if they were not all ready beforehand. De Luci and Jocelin de Bailleul, of whom little else is known, were reputed to be the draughtsmen. A parchment containing the alleged customs was brought in and read, amidst clamorous applause. One of them is the identical law which the king had failed to carry at Westminster.

The archbishop listened with calmness, made his running comments, and stated his objections to them one by one. As soon as the reading was finished, the king exclaimed: "These are the customs to which you have submitted: and, to prevent future question, I will that the archbishop put his seal to them."

He refuses
to seal.

"Never, by the Almighty God," was the answer of Archbishop Becket, "as long as breath remains in this body, will I put seal to these!" *

That word he kept. To the written instrument he never put seal, and never gave word of promise.

* Grim, c. 31; Rog. Pont., c. 36; Hoveden, i. p. 222. An opposite statement that he did seal is best refuted by the preamble of the code itself, as published. There is a copy of it in Robertson's "Materials," etc., vol. iv. p. 207, and in Stubbs's "Select Charters."

It might afterwards have been maintained that his general oath to observe the customs, when no customs were defined, bound him to nothing. But he knew the royal purpose, in one at least of the "constitutions" so called—that regarding the trial and punishment of clerical criminals; and on this account he felt that he had forsworn himself.

Acknowledging that he had sinned, although under constraint, he declared, however, that the whole proceeding was a fraud upon him. The two templars must have been more amazed than he was. They could hardly have pledged themselves as they did without the royal word pledged to them. It was less out of regard for their souls, than for the credit of his own mastery, that the king ceased to insist upon the sealing. It was plain that the primate would yield no further, and to persist in the command to seal, was to tarnish the poor triumph he had gained.

As it was, he could claim the victory. He published "the constitutions," as "customs of the realm which the archbishops and bishops, in the presence of the attesting witnesses, had promised by word of mouth, *vivâ voce*, with all good faith to observe." A copy of them was given to each of the archbishops, and a third remained with the king's officials. Thomas took his departure, protesting that his acceptance of the copy was not to be taken as a submission to its contents.

How far
blamable.

Was his conduct faulty or unchristian? It is not an easy question to answer. Whether to hinder a terrible crime, a man may lie, or, under all circumstances, and whatever foreseen consequences, the simple word of truth must still be spoken, is a question on which different opinions will always be held. Few will maintain—nobody with any knowledge of lunatics—that nothing but the exact truth must ever be spoken, even to a madman.

If anybody think that Becket did wrong, he must admit at least that he did it manfully, for the purpose, as he believed, of preventing worse wrong. He faced the difficulty, and confessed his perplexity, like a man honestly conscientious.

Tyranny of
the pro-
ceedings.

What these "Constitutions of Clarendon" were is a question quite secondary to the proceedings concerning them. No laws can be of much use or value to any people in subjection to a king, who, after one of their estates has given its rightful "Nay" to a new law of his proposal, proceeds, with hectoring and threatening, to compel the members of the same estate to declare their general assent to the customs of his realm, and then includes in a pretended record of such customs the very law they have vetoed!

Were they
customs?

Still it is a question of interest:—Were they ancient customs of England, as they were pretended to be; and were they, or any of them,

likely to be useful enactments if they were new? And useful Words were heard when they were read, "These are no ancient customs;" and of some of them the words were true.

"That a chief tenant of the king be not excommunicated without his consent," "that no appeal be made to the pope," and "no bishop leave the country for the pope's court without the king's leave," were laws or edicts of the first Norman, although it had been found impracticable to enforce them.

But "that criminous clerks should be tried in the king's court, and suffer the same penalties as laymen," the principal law here in question, was at variance with every law and custom of the realm from its earliest records. That it is a law good in itself, or can be made so when a people desire it, and that it ultimately became the law of England, are truths quite beside every question here.

"That the revenues of vacant bishoprics should belong to the king," was to write in the laws of England one of the abuses of shameless Rufus and unscrupulous Flambard. Before the Conquest the bishop of the diocese took care of the revenues of a vacant abbey, and the archbishop of a vacant see. Rufus and the kings after him seized the estates of vacant sees and abbeys, and took the revenues as long as they pleased.

f "That upon the vacancy of a bishopric, the electors should be summoned to make their election in the king's chapel, and be kept there till they elected with his assent" (*i.e.* till they elected his nominee), was open to a like objection with the last. It was a mode of election enforced before this, but by usurpation. It would have been a new thing to sanction it by law. It is true also that the king, by means fair or foul, seldom failed to get his own way in these elections. It would have saved him trouble, no doubt, but it would have been hardly fair to the electors to have always to go up to the king's chapel to be coerced, instead of his having to run after them to coerce them.

Nor was this all. The new constitution empowers the king to summon the chief persons (*potiores personas*) of a chapter to make the election. Under such a law, he could select whom he would.

. The last of the "Constitutions," "that no son of a peasant should be admitted to holy orders without the consent of the lord on whose land he was born," was an invasion of a valued and valuable privilege of the peasantry. It indicated, not only that the landlords of England felt no honour in the career of Nicholas Breakspeare, but that the exaltation of a poor English boy to the papal throne increased their fear of their English villagers; as well it might.

What is yet more extraordinary, and it is pointed out by Becket in one of his letters, the king's lawyers and writers who drew the "Constitutions" were guilty of the singular oversight of allowing one of them to bear its quiet testimony for the archbishop against the king upon a point of contention, the very mention of which "always drove him into a fury."

The saving clause was a custom.

Archbishops and bishops, abbots and priors, after election in the king's chapel, are to do homage to the king, for land and life and members, saving the rights of their order—*salvo ordine suo*. It stands to this day, in the twelfth of the famous "Constitutions of Clarendon," an unanswerable testimony to the ancient and universal custom.

① The king, it is probable, was but imperfectly acquainted with the "ancient customs" of the realm; but he must have known, as well as the archbishop did, that it was contrary to all custom to inflict upon the people who could read and write the cruel punishments of the Norman criminal laws. He gained the coveted power, and for a time made free use of it. Whether it was a reform or not, certainly it was no custom of the realm; and the best of laws enacted by such means can be of no advantage to any people.

Becket had felt himself drawn, under constraint, into an action he condemned. As he rode with his friends and chaplains from Clarendon to Win-

Becket self-condemned.

chester, he was observed to be sad and weary, and he was as wretched as he looked. He immediately suspended himself from all sacred offices ; he submitted his troubles and his falsehood to the pope, and asked for his absolution. Twice he attempted to cross the sea, and carry his personal confession to the pope at Sens, but the weather or the mariners obliged him to put back. He had only small vessels at his command, and the sailors had their fears of the king. The pope fully understood his trouble, and exhorted him to resume his sacred offices, reminding him of the difference between words spoken freely and words spoken under constraint.

The king was highly exasperated by his attempts to go abroad. He was afraid both of his spiritual weapons and of his influence with the pope. To guard against these dangers Henry requested the pope to send a legate's commission to the Archbishop of York. As papal legate, Archbishop Roger would have been supreme over the English Church in both provinces. The pope's conduct, in answer to the king, gives us an example of artful simplicity under difficulties.

Papal treatment of an angry king.

Alexander sent the legate's commission desired ; but he sent it to the king, and under condition that it was not to be delivered to the archbishop to whom it was addressed, without the pope's further knowledge and consent. The commission,

with the condition attached to it, was at the same time made known to Archbishop Thomas, with a request that if the king handed it on to Roger, the pope should have instant information, and he would send another instrument, exempting the Archbishop of Canterbury and his church and city of Canterbury from all legatine authority.* He had granted the commission even thus limited, only to guard against aggravation of the royal anger and excitement.

Henry was afterwards duped, and made a laughing-stock, and more than once by pope's letters. But he saw the futility of this show of compliance, and sent back the letter of legation.

"The king and kingdom will be the laughing-stock of all peoples around, for a nation *as destitute of council as it is of law*." So the two earls declared, and they implored the archbishop to prevent it.

What the
councils
were.

Destitute of council, nevertheless, was the so-called "Council of Clarendon," with others before it and to follow. There may be deliberation and discussion amidst riot and clamour. But here there was no deliberation and no pretence of it. There was no thought of reform. The king sought to extend his despotism, and to augment his revenue, and contended with storms of wrath and atrocious threats of violence. De Luci was his willing secretary. The lords were a mob of

* Letter l.

bravoes, ready to do his bidding, with a few wiser or cooler heads among them, shocked and horrified, but helpless.

One man, with a conscience of right and public duty, had also the will and the power to contend for them. Forced into a show of concession for the moment, he never faltered in his purpose that government by threats and violence should not prevail in England if he could hinder it.

Hating tyranny with the vehemence of a passion, reared in boyhood amidst the woes of an anarchy, which had been its fruit, he was resolved to hold sacred, with his life, the last shred of English liberty that was left.

No free intelligent life was possible among such men as crowded upon him and threatened him. There was need of new ideas and new men. One true man was to teach those barons to be men.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NORTHAMPTON PLOT, KNOWN AS "THE COUNCIL OF NORTHAMPTON."

THE code of "Customs," so called, drawn by De Luci and his assistants, had been promulgated, as laws of England, under the name of "The Constitutions of Clarendon."

To put them in force, it was necessary to silence the archbishop.

This was an essential preliminary. Without it the king would have to count upon his resistance in every attempt to enforce them, and might be foiled, as he had been before. The archbishop must therefore be crushed, or the king retire baffled from the contest. An elaborate plot was devised and executed for the purpose.

In preparation for the struggle, a new law or custom was found to be wanted. A writer, who informs us that he served the archbishop during his exile, and therefore has, with reason, been thought (for his narrative confirms it) to have had

all his information from him, tells us that this new "Constitution" was decreed and published upon the sole authority of the king.* Intended for a weapon against the archbishop, it became a grievance to the barons.

"If any one having a suit in a lord's court, shall prosecute it during two days' sessions and fail, it shall be lawful for him, on his swearing that justice is not done, to withdraw from that court, and to have recourse to the court of the superior lord." Such was the new law.

Some instances of Henry's lawgiving and law-abiding we have had. We have here another.

A royal edict, to be called a law, is issued, and is immediately put in force, and, we shall clearly see, upon a false, trumped-up claim; and all for the purpose of bringing the Archbishop of Canterbury before the king as a transgressor of his laws!

Claim of
John the
Marshal.

One John, a king's marshal and a member of his household, laid claim to a farm in the archbishop's village of Pagham, and brought his suit in the archbishop's court. He had no ground of claim whatever; but after some days he accused the court of denying him justice, and took his oath, it was alleged, not on the Gospels or relics of the saints, but on a book of songs, or something of the kind, which he drew out of his pocket and was not sufficiently careful to conceal.

* Roger of Pontigny, c. 40.

He then complained to the king of failure of justice, and the king, upon his new "Constitution," forthwith summoned the archbishop to answer before him.

Appeals to the king against the archbishop.

The archbishop did not attend personally, but he appeared by four knights, who excused his absence on the ground of illness, and produced letters from himself and from the Sheriff of Kent, attesting that John the Marshal had no case. They gave evidence also that he had not taken the lawful oath, and had no right of appeal.

His method of administering justice.

Under ordinary circumstances this appearance by deputy would have been allowed. It was now construed into an insult of the king by contempt of the royal summons. The four knights were seized and detained, on the charge of bringing false and null excuses into the king's court, and obtained their release with difficulty, upon finding securities to be at his mercy.

Another "Great Council" of the nation was forthwith summoned at Northampton,* for hearing the case against the archbishop and calling him to account for his contempt of a royal summons. It was the same year as the "Council of Clarendon."

October, 1164.

The customary letter of summons went to the members of the Council, including all the bishops, except the archbishop, who had the first right to it. He received instead a citation as a culprit, sent to

Citation of the archbishop at Northampton.

* The accounts of this assemblage are copious.

him through the Sheriff of Kent, to attend and answer in the case of John the Marshal.

They were waiting at Northampton on the day appointed (October 6), and were kept waiting. Henry was leisurely flying his hawks by the rivers, and arrived at night.

The next morning early the archbishop came to the castle and was ushered into the royal closet. The king was hearing Mass. Thomas waited for him, and rose when he entered, looking to be greeted with the kiss—the customary salutation. It was ominous of what followed that the king refused the usual greeting.

The archbishop began to speak of the case in which he was summoned. The king informed him that the marshal was detained by business in the Exchequer and might be expected the next day ; till then he could retire to his lodgings.

It may be guessed, with more than probability, that John the Marshal was busy looking into accounts in the Exchequer, presently to be heard of, and that the king intended the ex-chancellor to take note of it.

First day,
October 8.
The king
calls upon
the Council
to pass
sentence.

The next day, in the presence of the bishops and lords of England, and many of Normandy, the archbishop was accused of contempt of the king's majesty in disobeying a royal summons. No excuse was allowed. It went for nothing that he had answered, as was due, by four knights ;

that his personal attendance was prevented by illness ; that the knights put in the sheriff's letters, stating that the complaint of the king's marshal was groundless. The king had cited the archbishop, and the archbishop did not appear ; let the council give sentence against him.

The council, it was evident, did not like the business, and the king himself named a committee to assess the penalty. There were creatures among them in plenty, whose minds were as much at his service as their bodies, and they were not long in condemning him to forfeit all his moveable property to the king, or pay a fine of £500. One account has £50, but the other evidently is correct.

Arbitrary
and unlawful
sentence.

Still there was some difficulty in finding persons to pronounce the sentence. The archbishop might retort upon them with his sentence of excommunication. The barons desired the bishops to declare the judgment—an ecclesiastic must be condemned by ecclesiastics. Not so, the bishops replied ; it is a judgment in a secular matter, and must be declared by lords secular. Besides, it is not for bishops to be the judges of their archbishop, who is their lord.

The king hearing of the dissension, gave his orders, with some warmth, that the Bishop of Winchester should pronounce the judgment ; and he did so.

“ This,” Becket said when he heard it, “ is a new

mode of administering justice ; I suppose under the new canons of Clarendon." * It was a just comment in such an assembly.

Nevertheless he had no alternative. The king's court was supreme, and he must submit to its judgment. The bishops advised him to take it quietly ; it was only a matter of money, and all of them except one, Gilbert of London, who refused, gave their sureties for the payment of the huge fine, amounting to what now would be £8000 or £10,000. It was an arbitrary sentence, in violation of all law. Every county had its fixed and customary fine for neglect of the king's summons. In this case the summons was not disobeyed, and, if it had been, the lawful fine for that offence in the county of Kent was neither £50 nor £500 ; it was forty shillings !

Nevertheless the sentence was passed without protest. There can be no difficulty in believing that humbler offenders, like De Broi, were branded and whipped to pacify the king.

The bishops, when they gave their bonds for the payment, expected that they had heard the full penalty to be imposed upon their primate. He had been summoned upon the case of John the Marshal and no other. They had no idea of what was coming. The king had many more hawks to fly. The first "iniquitous judgment had no effect

* *Herb. Bos.*, iii. 33. ,

in mitigating the fury of the tyrant." These words, in substance, were written then, and they are just.

The case itself of John the Marshal's claim was then gone into, and was found, even by this council, to be groundless. This failure only whetted the royal ardour for another onslaught. Becket, it was next alleged, had received rents to the amount of £300 on account of the two castles of Eye and Berkhamstead, of which he had had the custody and had not accounted for the money. He answered that he had had no summons upon this charge, but added, informally, that the moneys thus received had been expended, as was well known, in the repairs both of those castles and of the Tower of London. The king declared that he had given no authority for the one or for the other, and again demanded judgment for a debt of £300. The archbishop put in three lay lords as his securities for this payment. And so ended the proceedings of that day.

John's claim
groundless.

Further
demands ;

and call for
sentence.

The day following, Friday, October 9, the king went on with his sport. He now alleged that he had lent the archbishop, when chancellor, £500 for the expedition to Toulouse, and he had been security for him to a Jew for £500 more. It was at the same time intimated that he would be called to render an account of all rents and moneys which he had received as chancellor on account of vacant bishoprics, abbacies, baronies, and honours. He

Second day.
Accumulation of royal
claims, for
the arch-
bishop's
ruin.

M

admitted that he had received £500 from the king at Toulouse, and expostulated that it was unkingly to demand back what was really a gift and not a loan. He also pleaded his services in the campaign.

Another sentence.

This was enough. He admitted that he had received the money, and he had no evidence that it was a gift. He must pay it. He found five more sureties in £100 each.

Enormous claim on his Chancery accounts.

The great question was yet behind—his Chancery accounts. He pleaded again that he had not been summoned to answer in this matter; but he added that the king from time to time had overlooked his accounts, and had acquitted him. He also pleaded the full release given him when he became archbishop, and made this his chief defence. The bishops bore witness to it: it was well known. The king vociferated and swore. He must have the Chancery accounts rendered, and he insisted on having them to-morrow. The archbishop protested that it was contrary to right and custom for a man to be called to answer to-morrow on a charge brought only to-day, and in so great a matter. He asked for time to answer. The king vociferated and swore the more with terrible voice. There should be no delay. He must bring in his accounts on the morrow. The turbulent assembly was prolonged all day.

Third day.

The next day the council was short. The demand was insisted on, but he was allowed time for con-

ference with the bishops and chief persons ecclesiastical. We have an interesting account of their discussions.* The bishops, even of that age, with one exception, did not think all resistance perverse or wrong; but they easily agreed, also with one dissentient, that it was the prudent course to give in, to resign his office, and throw himself upon the royal mercy. Foliot reminded him of the evil times and his obligations to the king, and the ruin he would work, both to the Church and them, if he persisted. He ought to resign all, if it were ten times more. Perhaps, if he humbled himself, the king would restore him all!

Henry of Winchester protested against so evil an example in the primate of all England. Hilary of Chichester recommended a show of submission for the moment. He might have known the king better, after his own experience at Colchester. Another bishop thought that Thomas must lose either his office or his life, and that to resign was the lesser evil. Another, that the persecution was personal and not general, and that it was better that one member should suffer in part than that the whole Church should be endangered.

Another bishop, the son of Robert, Earl of Gloucester, Matilda's brother and captain, affirmed that to advise a bishop to resign his charge of souls because the king threatened, was against his

* Alan, c. 6, 7; Gervase, i. 183.

conscience, and to advise resistance was to be put out of the synagogue and accounted a criminal. He would, therefore, give no advice one way or the other. At least, if he did not advise, he left no doubt of his opinion.

Another bishop was absent under a stroke of palsy, and another, who had private information of the king's intentions, kept himself away, and wished that God had given him the same excuse.

The conference is worth attention. It shows that the times had need of a man who could teach the rulers of Church as well as of State.

Henry of Winchester gave in last to the prevailing current,* but not till he had induced the archbishop to offer 2000 marks for his acquittal, and promised his cordial and substantial aid.

The offer was made and refused. That was not the king's end in view. No, he said ; it is a question of 44,000 marks (£30,000)—far in the hundreds of thousands, measured by the money of this day ! The demand was an amazement to all who heard it. "There was nothing but the prison for him," they murmured. "Or something worse," was also heard.

His danger was evident, and he faced it, though now he stood alone, with all the world, lay and clerical, against him. They all looked to immediate safety and convenience. His eye was upon

* Grim, c. 44.

consequences more remote, and his resolve at all hazards to stand fast for what he saw to be the right. What they said was true ; he would never have peace as archbishop. The king was bent upon his resignation. England would not hold them both. He had better be plain Thomas than nothing.

"Never," was his answer, "while life remains to me."

On the Sunday there was no court, but private meetings and conferences continued throughout the day. The Lords of the Council were so much interested and occupied in their discussions among themselves that, we are told, "they had hardly time to eat." There was life in them then, those barons, when they were out of the shadow of the king.

In what condition the archbishop had left the Chancery accounts thus suddenly called for must, to some extent, be open to question. If they were complete and exact, the king must have known it. We might conjecture from the precipitate demand for accounts so large, without previous summons, that the enormous claim upon them was false and fraudulent.

Probable facts of the case.

On the other hand, it appears hardly possible that Becket's private resources, large as they were, could have covered the expenditure of a military expedition like that of Toulouse, or of a peaceful embassy such as that to Paris. Expenses of this

kind, although incurred in the public service, were not strictly chargeable on the king's revenues that passed through his hands. If he drew upon them for these expenses—and it is difficult to see how he could have avoided it—it must have been done with the king's tacit consent. It is every way likely, from the character of the two men, that the chancellor presumed on his master's sufferance, and that Henry, when he looked at the accounts, did it in a good-natured and cursory manner, and was easily satisfied. Most likely, whatever may be the truth in this respect, the chancellor's aptitude for business brought more than was expected into the Exchequer.

But if the king was content at the time, it would appear that the chancellor obtained no formal evidence of it, and could produce no lawful instrument of discharge, except the general release when he became archbishop. He dwells much upon this release, and says very little of any other, although we hear from one writer already quoted that he did allege his acquittal after audit of his accounts by the king.

As regards Henry, there is not much to choose between one view of his conduct and another. Upon any possible account of the facts, it was more than defiant of kingly dignity. After the well-known public acquittal of the chancellor, on the word of a king, it was equally so of common

honesty. There are clear indications that the royal tactics were a surprise to everybody even there, except to a few who had private information of them. They went beyond their imagination of things possible. For once, at least, Henry outdid all his contemporaries.

On the Sunday (October 11), so busy to the lords, the archbishop did not leave his lodgings in St. Andrew's Priory. Anxiety and want of sleep brought on a fit of a complaint to which he was subject, and on the Monday he was too ill to go Fourth day. to the court. If he had sent in his resignation, there would have been peace within the castle walls; but he did not do that, and the enraged monarch swore more terribly than ever. It was all a sham. Let him attend the court; there shall be no excuse. The two great earls were sent to bring him. He entreated to be spared; they were witnesses of what he was suffering, but he would swear to attend to-morrow, if he had to be carried on his bed.

To-morrow, then. The morrow was to end the proceedings shameful to king and barons—to the king whose conduct many a huckster of his own day would have thought degrading to him; to barons whose morals and manners were still those of the men who came over with the Conqueror.

The same day (Monday) the sick man had repeated tidings of imminent dangers. There was

talk of his perpetual imprisonment, of his losing limb or eyes like some felon peasant ; the king had threatened to have his head ; royalist bravoës were banded together to take his life. He had every cause for apprehension. Anything was credible, and events proved that anything was possible. He owed it to his own skilful management that the catastrophe which came six years later, and came then because he saw it must, did not happen now. He was as ready now as afterwards, to die for liberty if need were ; but he would defend himself, and fight his righteous battle, if he could. He would not flinch, he would not resign, under any terrors ; and he would give time for the "iniquity" he resisted to abate itself, or to show itself incorrigible. That was his own account of his conduct. The day of sickness was a day of thought for him ; and he prepared himself for the morrow. He had spiritual weapons, which also had their terrors. He would not use them, but he would make them seen and feared. It turned out, as often happens with more carnal weapons, that the reserved fire effected more than the discharge could have done. His conduct, that last day of the Council of Northampton, much censured, was as wise as it was successful for his purpose.

Fifth day,
October 13.
Dangers
threatened.

On the Tuesday morning, the bishops came to him early in great alarm. He might look for any outrage : it was the least to be expected that he

should be accused and tried as a perjurer and a traitor. They were now urgent that he should resign.

But no ; he had not taken his office to fly in time of danger. The world might rage and the flesh was weak, but, with God's help, he would never desert his flock. Though he were silent, ages to come would tell how they, his bishops, had deserted him. During two days they had sat in judgment upon their archbishop and father in matters of secular import, and they were now ready, it appeared, to sit in a secular tribunal, and be his judges on a criminal charge. He inhibited them, upon their obedience, from doing anything of the kind. Upon that inhibition he now appealed to the pope ; and he charged them all, if violent hands were laid upon him, to put forth their ecclesiastical censures in his defence.

He will not resign.

He inhibits all the bishops under appeal to the pope.

The bishops found him impracticable, and went their way ; and he began the day of conflict as he intended it to go on. He went to his service in the chapel, and chose for it, not the office of the day, but the Mass of Stephen, the first martyr, with its introit, " Princes did sit and speak against me." He was deeply agitated and in tears.

His early Mass.

He wore his pall, and would have proceeded to the court in full pontifical vestments, and barefoot. He was dissuaded from this, and with stole over his shoulders, on horseback, with two attendant clergy, the last of forty who had come with him, he

Scenes in the street ;

passed through the crowds of people who filled the street, all well acquainted with the dangers he was facing, all kneeling, many of them weeping and wailing aloud for him, as going to his death.* It needs little imagination of all that the poor people had suffered for a hundred years, under the Norman French and their kings, to understand the feelings of Englishmen for their archbishop, whom they looked upon as one of themselves, who would rather die than be the tyrant's slave.

and at the
castle.

The castle gates were quickly opened for him, and as quickly shut. There was a rush of nobles and knights and men of every degree from the hall door to look at him as he rode into the court. Whatever their faults, at least they were brave men in battle, and in their hearts they honoured the man who could bravely fight more than they honoured him by their words or acts.

He enters,
carrying his
crozier.

Before he reached the door he dismounted, and took his silver cross out of the hands of Alexander Llewellyn, its bearer. He had resolved that day to carry it himself. There was a murmur of surprise. Among the bystanders at the hall door was Bishop Foliot. "What! my lord of London," said one, "will you allow him to be his own cross-bearer?" "He was always a fool, and always will be," the bishop replied, according to whose measure no doubt Thomas was a fool.

* Rog. Pont., c. 44.

Yet all made way for him, as, uplifted crucifix in hand, he walked through the crowded hall into the ante-room beyond it. The king with his intimates was in a chamber on a higher floor. It was said that he fled from the archbishop and his cross. At all events they never met on that turbulent day.

In the ante-room he heard many remonstrances : " You are coming armed against the king." " The king's sword is sharper than yours." " You'll aggravate the king more than ever." Foliot was not content to remonstrate. He laid hands upon the staff of the cross, and would have wrested his standard from his grasp. There was a struggle with both hands. But the bishop was the weaker man and failed ; and, at that moment, must have looked the greater fool of the two.

Cross in hand, all eyes upon him, Thomas took his seat with the bishops. The two chaplains were with him, William Fitz-Stephen and Herbert of Bosham. Only one of them, Herbert there can be no doubt, had ventured by his side, as he walked up the castle hall. Fitz-Stephen was cautious, and soon made his peace with the king by a laudatory poem, not very poetical. In this respect he was a solitary exception among the friends of Becket. Both of them became his biographers, and were often his advisers, for he listened to advice, and often took it ; but they are almost as far as the mob of courtiers from his real mind.

Presently the bishops were summoned to the king. The archbishop was left with his two friends. Herbert reminded him, in a whisper, of the spiritual weapons he could employ if violent hands were laid upon him. The other protested against church censures in revenge of private injuries. A marshal, with a wand, commanded silence. The king would roar ; nobody else might whisper, except in applause. Silenced, Fitz-Stephen pointed to the crucifix. The one adviser was for quick contention ; the other for unresisting endurance unto death. Thomas knew better than either of them what to do.

Clamorous
proceedings.

The king made loud complaint to his lords of the archbishop's insolence in entering his court as he had done. They answered clamorously that it was an insult to the kingdom and to all of them : he was a perjurer and a traitor, and against the king who had done so much for him. Let him be tried and dealt with as a traitor.

Castle riot.

The noise became so uproarious, that the people in the hall below were terrified. There were rumours of assassins, and of a sentence of death passed by the king. The archbishop sat quiet when the bishops came back and stood around him, sad and silent. Their looks seemed to confirm the rumours. "I see," he said, "that something strange concerning me is in discussion up there and that the cause of God's Church is in

danger. I am obliged to appeal to the pope, and I charge you all, on your obedience, and at the peril of your souls, that if I am murdered or sent to prison, you spare no one, but execute due justice."

The bishops found themselves in a perplexity between king, and pope, and archbishop. If the king called them to sit in judgment, they must incur his displeasure by refusing ; or, obeying him, fall under the sentence of the archbishop, already denounced, and, they feared, be declared excommunicate in the public audience of the court. If he were put to death by the king's order, or by assassins, they would be held responsible by the pope, and might incur still heavier censures.

Dilemma of
the bishops.

They sought audience of the king, and informed him that the archbishop had appealed them all to the pope for taking part against him in secular judgments, and particularly in the illegal sentence for neglect of summons in the case of John the Marshal. They also represented to him the dishonour he would incur by violence. They entreated him to allow them to deal with the archbishop. They would use all their power and influence for his deprivation. They would appeal him to the pope of perjury, in leading them to give their assent to the Constitutions of Clarendon, and afterwards forbidding obedience to them. They prayed the king's permission to appeal ; and, in the mean-

time, to be excused from taking part in any judgment upon him. They would silence him. They would humble him to the king's will. Archbishop Roger and Bishop Foliot supported the others in deprecating open violence ; but they gave the king their separate advice, that he should be taken quietly and sent to prison as soon as the Council was dissolved.

King's message to him.

Before the king answered their petition, he sent a deputation of earls and barons, to demand of the archbishop whether he persisted in his appeal to the pope, in defiance of the Constitutions which it was alleged he had sworn to observe ; and also whether he would give security for rendering his chancery accounts, and would abide the judgment of the king's court upon them. After fixing his

His answer.

eye upon his crucifix, the archbishop sat down to give his answer. On the question of accounts only one answer was possible. He was pledged to the utmost of his means before they were called in question. He had exhausted the ability of his friends, and could give no more sureties. His own resources had been all expended in the king's service, and he was burdened with heavy debts besides. He protested again that he had been summoned to answer in the case of John the Marshal, and in no other ; and he declared that he would answer no more to a charge against him, brought, not of justice, but of angry contention.

It was true he had appealed the bishops. They had taken part in a judgment upon him, which violated the customs of ages : and he had inhibited them, and did inhibit them from sitting in judgment upon him, pending the appeal. He still appealed, and put himself and his Church of Canterbury under the protection of God and the pope.

The deputation returned with his answer ; some Commotion. in thoughtful silence, some exclaiming, " We have heard his contempt of the king's commands from his own mouth." In every room where men could gather there were audible signs of sensation ; Savage threats. among them, his ear caught loud whispers of Odo's prison, and Stigand's dungeon pit, and Earl Geoffrey's charger. *

The king "boiled with rage." "He shall not escape us. He derogates from our jurisdiction by appealing to another. Let him feel the weight of The king demands sentence. ours. Deprive of his own due honours the subject who will not give due honour to his lord. Go and decide what sentence shall be passed on a man who contumaciously resists his lord." * It was another royal demand for exemplary punishment, throwing the odium of the arbitrary sentence upon others.

The barons, in excited clamour, becoming louder and louder and more appalling to those outside,

* Fitz-Stephen, c. lv.

The
sentence.

concluded upon their judgment in what way they could, and handed it to the king, who accepted it: "Let Thomas the archbishop be consigned in chains to prison for traitorous contempt of the royal majesty and as a disturber of the public peace." * It was a sentence to chains and dungeon, lawless, to pacify the king. It remained to pronounce the sentence.

The bishops
obtain leave
to appeal.

That, however, not one of all of them ever did or dared to do. First, the king desired the bishops to pronounce it, having the barons with them, upon the errand. He insisted upon it by their duty to him and their sworn fidelity. They begged earnestly to be excused. The archbishop had inhibited them from it, under appeal to the pope. They would stand worse with the pope if they treated the appeal with contempt. It would serve the king better if he gave them permission to appeal. He was persuaded, or saw that it was hopeless to use them better than in the way they desired. He gave them his permission to appeal, and they returned to the ante-room, where Hilary of Chichester announced it to their chief. Some of them then went away; the rest sat down in their places by him, and waited to see the end.

No one
dared to
pronounce
the sentence.

The lords were as unwilling as the bishops to pronounce the sentence. Every one shrank from it; every one was afraid of his reserved fire. There

* W. Cant, i. 29; Grim, c. 47; Hov., i. 228; Gervase, i. 188.

is something marvellous to us in this universal horror of excommunication ; and yet that scene of carnal passions, subdued under the fear of spiritual terrors, even if imaginary terrors, has in it something of the sublime. It was well that the lawless king and barons were compelled to stand in awe of something.

At last, after some delay, the crowd of lords came down to the ante-room and stood facing him. He would have risen : his more pugnacious chaplain advised him to receive them sitting. The aged Earl of Leicester walked in front, and seemed likely to be the spokesman, but he asked some others to do the office. When all refused, he was obliged to undertake it himself.

He had always been friendly to the archbishop, and was believed to be so still. He began by reminding him of the king's friendship and favours to him, and was thought slow in coming to the point. At last he spoke of judgment, and let fall the word "perjury." The archbishop instantly rose. He sprung to his feet, holding in front of him his crosier-standard.

Leicester attempts and fails.

"Judgment,"* he said. "Nay, my son, but hear me first. Sentence follows trial. There has been no trial. I have answered in none. I was summoned in no cause save that of John the Marshal." He repeated his defence, that the king, in confirm-

* Alan, c. 10.

ing his election as archbishop, "gave him full and absolute discharge from all secular obligations."

"That's not what London told the king," the earl was heard to say.

The archbishop went on, it was not for them to pass judgment upon him, and by the powers committed to him from above, he inhibited the earl by name from presuming to pass judgment upon his father and pastor.

It was enough. The earl declared that he would no more open his mouth,* and, turning to the Earl, of Cornwall, desired him to complete the business on which they had come. Cornwall would not presume ; he had no commands.

There was an awkward pause, broken at length by a suggestion that they should report his answer to the king, and take his further pleasure.

The arch-
bishop
leaves the
castle.

They went. The archbishop again appealed the bishops to the pope, and with the words, "I will be going, too ; it's getting late," lifted up his cross again and rose.

Riot.

There was a cry, "The traitor's going!" He passed out, and walked again through the crowded hall, carrying his cross. Shouts and insults came upon him from all sides.† Knots of straw and light missiles were flung at him. And he was not callous to the insults. Reviled, he did not refrain from reviling again. Men of his nature neither

* W. Cant, i. 30.

† Rog. Pont., c. 49.

do nor can, unless they have been converted into saints. He never was, and never pretended to be. He was the same Thomas Becket he had always been. "Mean lad, bastard ; not worth the notice of a man," was his answer to one, a half-brother of the king. To another, Ranulf de Broc, "At least, none of my family was ever hanged for crime." "Liar!" to another who cried, "Traitor!" And to another, "Liar! and, if I were a knight, and not a priest, I would prove you liar with my own hand." Stumbling at a bundle of firewood, he kept his feet with some difficulty, and the cries were redoubled. The noise was "like that of a city on fire, or under assault ;" but no man laid hands on him.

He gives railing for railing.

Herbert was his companion through it all. He saw him mounted, and they came to the court gate, and, to their consternation, found it locked. One of his servants, whose name is preserved, had been waiting all day, and had kept his eyes open. He found a bundle of keys upon a nail, with the gate-key among them, while for the moment the porter's vigilance was occupied within hearing, in lashing some culprit with a rod. They got out again into the crowded street. It was observed that among the poor people who thronged it there were many afflicted with the disease called the king's evil—not a pleasant testimony to the condition of the poor in those days of manor-rule.

Scene in the street ;

There was a shout of joy when they saw the

archbishop coming out from "the wild beasts' den," for so they called it. It was as much as he could do to manage his horse, and carry his cross, and give his blessing to the kneeling multitude, as he rode through them to the monastery. Nearly all his retinue had fled, even those of his household. A few knights and well-born youths were waiting for his leave to depart, and left him with tears.

and at the
prior's.

He went first to the chapel, and bowed himself before the altar. He asked if it were none: it was nearing sunset; so he said none and vespers together, and ordered his supper to be served. Six or eight of all who came with him remained to sup, and then departed; but the table was served as it had been for all, and he had it filled with poor people from the street. During supper he was cheerful, and ordered a bed to be made for him behind the high altar of the chapel, that he might sleep in peace. Once already he had passed the night in the chapel with some of his clergy. This night he would be alone. He waited while three bishops went for him to the king to ask permission and safe-conduct for his going abroad. He must have known well that he would obtain no such license, and wished, perhaps, to divert attention from his movements. The bishops found the king in high spirits. He would answer to-morrow. After the scene in the castle hall he had issued an order that the archbishop was not to be molested.

Becket had good reason for not awaiting the The flight. morrow. He called two monks and a trusty servant, and told them he must depart with all speed. They were to provide four good horses, not of his own ; and he would go to the church early, as if to rest. All was managed to perfection. Fortunately, it was a dark, tempestuous night ; the clouds were so dense that no one saw the horses pass, and the rain pelted so loudly that they were not heard. They got out of the north gate before it was closed, and rode to a place called "Graham, twenty-five miles from Northampton," where they rested for some time. This has been understood to be Grantham, forty miles from Northampton. The village of Gretton seems more likely, unless there is an error of distance. But all accounts agree that they arrived at Lincoln * the following morning, apparently about ten o'clock. The rain came down in torrents, and his cloak was twice cut shorter to lighten it. He had chosen men who could ride with him.

Equal to all emergencies, Becket thus travelled seventy miles in a night, and in a direction opposite to the road for Dover, upon which the king was likely to pursue him, and in fact did. He then turned southward, by another unlikely route. After resting for the day, at Lincoln, with a fuller, a friend of one of his monks,

* Herb. Bos., iv. 3 ; Grim, c. 49 ; Rog. Pont., c. 52.

at night they went by boat on the Witham to Haverholme, then a small cell or hermitage surrounded by the waters belonging to the priory of Sempringham, where they rested three days. They went on, travelling by night and resting by day at religious houses—Boston and Chicksand among them,—till they reached Eastry near Sandwich, a manor of the priory of Canterbury. He had taken the name of Brother Christian.

It was important not to have to put back after leaving land, as he had done before ; and he was delayed at Eastry for a week. On November 2, nearly three weeks after his flight from Northampton, with two monks, in a small vessel specially provided, he put off, after nightfall, from the beach, and landed before morning on the beach not far from Gravelines. They went some distance on foot ; but he was worn out with trouble and sea-sickness, and they were glad to find him a cart-horse, with a rope of hay for a halter. At St. Omer, singularly enough, he fell in with De Luci, who would have persuaded him to go back with him ; but that was not likely. He had been recognized at an inn. De Luci took no part in the proceedings at Northampton.

From St. Omer, he sent messengers to the Count of Flanders, to ask for a safe-conduct through his territories ; but, distrusting his answer, he got away by night, as skilfully as he had done

from Northampton ; and made all haste till he arrived at Soissons, within the territories of the French king.

Thus the archbishop, by his prudent and skilful flight, nullified the Northampton plot, baffled the king's expectations of ousting him, escaped the chains and dungeon pit, and left in their deserved contempt the base means he had employed to accomplish his end.

Was he contending, in all he did and suffered, for nothing greater than Church privileges or clerical immunities? Under sentences of enormous fines, accumulated upon him, to his ruin, with an audacity of lawlessness which the most expert of bravoës might have envied ; with shouts of the dungeon, the knife, the hangman ringing in his ears ; compelled to seek safety on a foreign shore ; sacrificing the greatest condition in the world, beneath a king's, with all its honours and advantages, for one of destitution to himself and many others ; at last, contending obstinately to the death ; and all because he would not allow himself—the one and only man whom all the world acknowledged to have the right, and all the world believed to be under a sacred duty—to take his part in the great council of the nation, with a judgment and a will of his own ; because he would not be the tool of an unscrupulous king, in his outrageous tyranny. Contending for clerical immunities !

All for
Church
privileges?

His immediate contention, it is evident, was for his personal liberty of action. He would have been the one great man of his age, if he had had no higher purpose than, at the cost of all things, to maintain his own individual freedom. He contended, and knew that he was contending, for much more.

The giant wrong of his time was the oppression of the English people by the half-foreign lords ; and the foreign king was the keystone of the evil fabric of society. He recognized it to be his paramount duty, as archbishop, to stand firm for his country, against the selfish despotism of the king.

"Better to die," he wrote later in the contest, "than sell the liberties of the Church, our inheritance from our fathers, to an impious king." *

"The liberties of the Church?" Yes! But they were the only liberties that were left. These gone and all was gone. While these remained, there still was hope that Englishmen would regain their own.

He was contending against the world for the last relic of the old English liberty ; and Englishmen of the humblest classes knew it then. He was struggling for the first gleam of the new English liberty ; and Englishmen, to their shame, do not know it now.

* Letter ccccxliii.

CHAPTER X.

KING AND ARCHBISHOP IN APPEAL TO THE POPE
—PAPAL DUPLICITIES IN EVIL TIMES.

IT was on the morning of October 14, the ninety-1164.
eighth anniversary of Hastings, when King Henry
was surprised by the tidings that the one free Eng-
lishman had fled. His anger, for once, was silent.
It had been one of the courtier's cries, "The king's
sword is sharper than yours." Henry felt, that
morning, that if it was sharper it did not reach so
far. A sentence of excommunication, or interdict,
was a real terror, and lost none of its force by
crossing the sea.

"We've not done with him yet," were the first
words he uttered, with a will ready for all that
followed.

Quick in action, as always, he gave orders for all
the coast to be watched to prevent the escape of
"his enemy," as he now called him. He confis-
cated to himself "the revenues of the archbishop's
estates, and appointed Ranulf de Broc, Becket's

The king's
precautions.

adversary at Northampton, his agent in charge. He sent letters to the sheriffs of counties, requiring them to deal in the same manner with the estates of the archbishop's clergy, and also to hold in custody their fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, and to seize their goods till the royal pleasure concerning them should be declared. He despatched orders to all the bishops to sequester in every diocese the incomes of all clergy who had taken any part with the archbishop "against the honour of the king and kingdom," and to give them no assistance or advice.*

Embassy to
King Lewis ;

At the same time, he sent an embassy to the French king, of which Gilbert of London and the Earl of Arundel were the principal persons. They were to request King Lewis to deliver up, or at least to expel from his territories, the king's personal enemy, "a man infamous for crimes and treasons, Thomas, late Archbishop of Canterbury, condemned as a traitor by the full council of his realm, and a fugitive from justice."†

The King of England descended so low as to remind King Lewis of the French towns that Becket had taken, and the French territories he had laid waste ; and to lay upon him the blame of the mischief he had done to France himself.‡

* Letters lxxvii. and lxxviii. † Letters lxx. and lxxi.

‡ W. Cant, i. 35.

The answer of the French king was honourable to him. He wondered how Thomas had ceased to be archbishop. If he had done injury to France, he had done his duty, and ought to be honoured for it. If he came to France a fugitive he would find an asylum and good entertainment. Lewis would do what he could to influence the pope, but his offices would not be in the direction that Henry desired; on the contrary, he would solicit the pope's protection for him.

From the French king the royal envoys went on to Sens to lay their master's complaints before the pope. They were heard in full consistory, and with self-interest, for they were well supplied with money. The cardinals are continually spoken of in records of the time as "keen-scented for lucre," and they had all the more need of money in their exile from Rome.

and to the
pope.

Roman
corruption.

A speech of Hilary of Chichester added amusement to other motives. His Latin, bad for a young schoolboy, provoked the jokes and laughter of the cardinals.* After many oportets and oportuits, and *oportuebats*, one of them remarked when he ceased, that he had toiled badly for port, but had made it at last.

Yet money, although it did much, would not do everything. The pope was cautious. He would comply with the king's request to send two card-

* Alan, c. 20.

nals to hear all complaints.* But he would not arm them with full powers without appeal: that was his own sacred right; "he would not give his glory to another."†

The arch-
bishop at
Rome.

The king's envoys left Rome four days before the arrival of the archbishop, who was expected.

He was honourably received, and soon showed himself in possession of all his old diplomatic skill. He presented to the pope a copy of the "Constitutions of Clarendon," upon some of which the judgment of the papal Court could not be doubtful. He confessed his sin in giving his assent to any of them under the terror of threatened violence.

At the same time he threw himself unreservedly upon the pope by delivering his ring into his hands and resigning his archbishopric. He thus submitted himself to removal from it; and the king's friends among the cardinals would gladly have made terms by his translation to another see. There was some discussion, but not much danger that his resignation would be accepted. "We are brothers in banishment," Alexander said, restoring him the ring; "let us be in fellowship for life."‡

He found a refuge for the archbishop in the Cistercian, or Grey Friars' house, at Pontigny, where he was hospitably and generously entertained for two years.

* Hov., i. 230; Diceto, i. 315. † Alan, c. 24; Gervase, i. 194.

‡ Alan, c. 29.

Thus disappointed, the king pursued his ends and his revenge by the most diabolical act of self-will that we have yet met with. From his palace of Marlborough, where he was spending his Christmas, he issued his order that all the relations of the archbishop, and all his clergy and their relations, whom he had in custody, should be banished the realm, and their property confiscated.

Under this order, about four hundred and forty people, his kinsmen in any degree ; his clergy who were with him, or had given him any assistance, or had been promoted by him, and their kinsmen ; people, lay and clerical, who had stood in any relation to him, or done him any service, even as servants, and all related to them,—some among them who had derived no advantage from him, some who had never seen his face ; all of them people who had committed no offence, and were charged with none,—men and women, widows and orphans, old and young, and infants at the breast, and among them, it is related, even women in labour, were torn from their homes, shipped beyond sea, and cast destitute upon a foreign shore in the depth of winter—all to show what a king of England could do with his “own land,” and to throw them as burdens upon the man who had sacrificed everything rather than surrender to his grasping despotism the last vestige of English freedom, and be his slave.

His friends
and relatives
expelled the
kingdom.

It was an execution of rights of conquest over the land and people of England, which he claimed to inherit from his great-grandfather.

Before the exiles were sent off, they were compelled to swear that they would make their way to Pontigny, and present themselves to the archbishop. A few disregarded the oath, and sought a livelihood where they could. After some deaths, the greater number of them arrived in destitution at the gates of the monastery. The archbishop met with friends among them who had been wealthy men. The French king and some of the nobles found them shelter in various places during the six years of their banishment from England.

The king's
influence at
Rome.

For some months the king was in danger of excommunication or interdict. But he had great influence in the Roman Court. The archbishop, on the contrary, had abundant messages of commendation, but not much hope of solid assistance. They told him that all the world at Rome was thanking God that "a man had arisen who would speak wisdom to kings." "They praised him all the more, because they were so weak themselves."

It was known before long that the king had obtained a respite. The pope sent his injunctions to Archbishop Thomas, because "the days were evil," to deal prudently and cautiously, and to bear with the king till the Easter following, which was that of 1166. His powers till then were

suspended ; in the papal language, his mouth was closed. Alexander hoped that the times would mend ; and that, after Easter, both he and Thomas would be able to proceed more safely.

This, however, was not enough for Henry, unless he could rid himself of the archbishop. With this view he sent envoys to an imperial diet at Wurzburg ;* who, it was said, swore obedience in his name to the anti-pope. A letter of his to the emperor declares his strong desire to have a just reason for withdrawing himself "from Pope Alexander and his perfidious cardinals, who presume to support the traitor Thomas, late archbishop,† etc. ;" and informs the emperor that he is about to send an important embassy to Rome, to require Alexander, who had lately returned thither, to deliver him from the archbishop, and enable him to proceed to the election of another in his place.

He seeks to be rid of the archbishop.

Diet at Wurzburg, 1165.

What was really done at Wurzburg was a question in dispute at the time. It is plain enough, however, that he was prepared to abjure Alexander, and to swear to any pope who would rid him of Archbishop Thomas ; and that he wished both the pope and the emperor to know this.

This scheme of religious warfare was rudely checked by a popular outbreak in London. Regi-

English feeling against the anti-pope.

* W. Cant., i. 44 ; Letters xcvi. and xcvi.

† Letter ccxiii.

1165 or
1166.

nald, Archbishop of Cologne, came to England soon after the diet of Wurzburg, to negotiate some royal marriage. The people called him a schismatic, and pulled down the altars where he and his priests had celebrated Mass.* There was a public feeling about pope and anti-pope which the king did not venture to despise. Even the Earl of Leicester refused to hold communion with Reginald of Cologne.

Church
sentences
impending.

As the Easter of 1166 drew nigh, the pope, little satisfied with the conduct of Henry, and himself in less fear of the emperor, not only restored to Thomas his full powers, but augmented them by appointing him papal legate in all England,† except the archdiocese of York. He even sent him special injunction no longer to hold his hand, but to issue his sentences.

The archbishop immediately sent his letters to all the English bishops, requiring them upon pain of the pope's anathema to make full restitution, within two months, of all they had taken under the king's commands from himself or any of his clergy.

As to the king himself he had no command, but was left with full powers. He gave notice of action by sending him the three usual letters,‡ preparatory to sentence against an important

* Diceto, i. 318; Matt. Paris, Hist. Maj., ii. 233.

† Letter clxxii.

‡ Letters clii.-cliv.

person—the first, a letter of advice; the second, of commonition, or caution; the third, of commination, or threatening. Two of the letters were delivered by a Cistercian abbot; the third by a barefoot friar. They are as respectful and mild in tone as exhortations to repentance can well be; but the mildest of them was not likely to be pleasant to the receiver of it, and he sent back “hard and bitter words.”

The archbishop, no doubt from regard to his hosts, avoided issuing his sentences from Pontigny. He went to Vezelay; and there, in the gloomy conventual church still standing, during a local festival on Whitsunday, with candles lighted and extinguished and the usual ceremonies for striking terror, before a country congregation gathered to the festival, he pronounced sentences of excommunication against John of Oxford and Richard of Ilchester, “the two swearers at Wurzburg,” as they were called by the archbishop and his friends; upon Richard de Luci and Jocelin de Bailleul, the authors of “the Constitutions of Clarendon;” and upon Ranulf de Broc and others by name, who held possession of the Church estates of Canterbury. He also condemned the so-called “Customs,” and excommunicated all who obeyed and all who enforced them.

He did not pronounce sentence upon the king. Henry was reported to be seriously ill, and for

Declared at
Vezelay,
June 12,
1166.

that or other reason he confined himself to public admonition.

This active measure has been condemned : it is difficult to see why. It was in fact a war in which both parties had their weapons of the time. The king used every weapon at his command ; the weaker combatant, if he contended at all, must have used such weapons as he had.

Their effect. The excommunications were immediately the talk of people of all classes,* especially of the clergy, throughout France and England.

The conduct of some of the persons interested affords us several curious views of the people of the time.†

The Empress Matilda, Henry's mother, then resident at Rouen, affected, when she heard of the sentences, to make light of them. " Were not they all excommunicated long ago ? " she said. It was noticed, however, that she avoided returning the salutation of one of them.

Church
liberty *vs.*
royal des-
potism.

She appears to have censured her son's conduct ; and she gave assistance to the co-exiles. A trustworthy correspondent, resident at Rouen, Nicholas of Mont St. Jacques, informs the archbishop, of what he had heard from herself, that her son had given her no information of his proceedings, because he knew that her sympathies were for " ecclesiastical liberty, rather than royal despot-

* Letter dxxxii.

† Appendix, note A.

ism." * The writer sees no alternative in things as they are ; and the expression is remarkable, if it was his own. It is much more so, if it was hers ; and we have no reason to doubt it. That the ancient rights of the clerical people which Becket defended were odious to the king, not because they were obstacles to better laws, but because they put restraint upon his own arbitrary tyranny,—such an expression of opinion, from a woman so capable, and so otherwise predisposed, would go far, if it stood alone, without confirmation of all the known facts, to justify the whole conduct of Archbishop Becket.

The writer goes on to say, that he explained to her the Constitutions of Clarendon, and some of them she approved of, but the most of them she condemned. She strongly blamed her son for having them written down and forced upon the bishops. "And the woman," he says, "is of tyrants' blood."

Matilda died at Rouen, the following year.

1167.

King Henry, although he was not included in the sentences, responded to them with his usual promptness. He sent orders to England to watch the ports, and prevent the entrance of pope's or archbishop's letters. Laymen bringing them in were to be put to death ; ecclesiastics, either bringing them or obeying them, to suffer the knife.

The king responds to the sentences.

* Letter lxxvi.

He drives
Becket from
Pontigny.

At the same time, he sent notice to the general congregation of the Cistercian order, assembled in session, and to the Abbot of Clairvaux, their permanent president,* that if their house of Pontigny persisted in harbouring his enemy, he would expel from their monasteries all the Cistercians in England, and send them over into France. The archbishop, as soon as he heard of it, withdrew, amid the tears of the brothers, from the house which had given him hospitality. The King of France found him another refuge, in a small religious house near Sens, not under the influence of the King of England.

His insane
frenzies.

Henry's personal conduct about the same time discovered a frenzy bordering on insanity, and what would be proof of insanity in any man but a tyrant who had never submitted to control. We have an account of a strange scene at Caen, which he was said to have enacted not long afterwards. He was discussing some matter with Richard Humez,† a servant or envoy from the King of Scots, who was in close alliance with him, and, about this time, taking part with him in a petty war in Brittany. Something that Humez said excited him into a fit of fury, even worse than ordinary. He used gross language and called him traitor; then, in his violence, he tossed his cap

* Alan, c. 19; Grim, c. 64; Letter clxxxviii.

† Letter ccliii.

from his head, tore off his belt, flung further his overcoat and other garments, pulled the silk coverlet from his bed, and sat down, as on a dunghill, chewing wisps of straw.

This story is told in a letter to Becket, from a friend whose name is not given. Singularly enough, it has obtained credit with modern writers, although it hardly rests on historical evidence ; for the anonymous writer had his information from a servant of Nicholas, and it ought to be passed over as idle gossip, if it were not too much in accordance with other things.

There is good evidence of what follows, and it is almost as foolish, and much more atrocious.

During the same year, some time before Martinmas, a pope's letter was put into his hands by a boy.* He took it, and immediately thrust his fingers into the boy's eyes, till blood flowed, and would have torn them out, if he had not been hindered. The eyes were saved ; but only upon order to pour hot water into the boy's mouth, till he told who had given him the letter. He confessed that he had it from the chaplain Herbert. It was a pope's letter of warning, sent through the archbishop. The bearer, a pope's messenger, after this cruel treatment, was thrown in irons into a dungeon, and was kept there, although the empress begged his release. Herbert, happening to be in the

* Letter ccliv.

king's territories, was diligently sought for, but escaped.

The day after this outrage, the king, it was observed, forbade his attendants to salute Richard of Ilchester, who was seen approaching him. He would not allow them to salute an excommunicate man. Probably it was a fit of banter: for he pretended to make light of the archbishop's sentences. Strong in his support, the excommunicates did not shun society, and were not avoided as was usual.

His efforts
to gain the
pope.

While King Henry was thus devising fresh impediments to appeals, and torturing a pope's messenger with his own hands, he was, at the same time, sparing no efforts to gain the pope's support and assistance for himself. His letters and messengers followed one another to Rome in quick succession. Of one mission, John Cumin and Ralph of Tamworth, are the chiefs; John of Oxford and Reginald, Archdeacon of Salisbury, of another.

John of
Oxford.

John of Oxford is the best known of these names. He made himself very busy at Rome, and caused some consternation upon his return, both in France and England.

The king's
plan.

It was in the instructions of one or more of these legations, to obtain a commission of two cardinals, named by the king himself, with full powers to decide all questions in dispute, without appeal.

The pope was to délegate his full authority to two judges selected by the king for their known bias in his favour, who were to come and hold a Court; and, after hearing all matters in dispute, were "to judge and canonically decide" that Thomas was Archbishop no longer.

That was the administration of justice contended for by the king, who, we are taught to believe, "initiated the reign of law" in England.

To gain the pope's high authority for this insolent proceeding, the king's envoys, in addition to other inducements, were to give the word of the king for a modification of "the Constitutions." It was reported that they offered to sacrifice them all. Events following show that this is unlikely; or that, if they did, it was only a ruse of war.

Their inducements, whatever they were, found strong support in the circumstances of the times. The pope in fear of the emperor. Pope Alexander was living in fear of the emperor and his anti-pope. The emperor was about to make a descent upon Italy with a great army. Alexander discovers his apprehension in a letter to Becket.* He earnestly requires of him to consider the dangerous state of the times; and not only to strive for peace and concord, but also, if all things do not go as he wishes, to dissemble his feelings for the present, and trust to time, with God's help, for bringing affairs back to their old state.

* Letter cclxxii.

The first
papal com-
mission;

It was under this apprehension of the Papal Court, that the king's envoys obtained a success which surprised the partisans on both sides. A pope's letter,* dated within six months of the day of Vezelay, notifies to the king, that he will send such a commission as he desires, although it is very inconvenient to him, for he can ill spare any of his cardinals at such a time, and, least of all, those whom the king has asked for. They are to come to the king's presence with full powers of hearing, judging, and canonically determining all the sundry ecclesiastical questions between the king and "our venerable brother Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury," and also the question on appeal between him and the bishops.

"Meanwhile," such is the management of the pope and his curia, "and till these questions are determined," the pope has strictly inhibited the Archbishop "from all measures that would cause annoyance, trouble, or disquiet to the king or any of his territories:" and the cardinals commissioners have powers to absolve the king's friends and counsellors from the sentences which the archbishop has already passed upon them.

The pope could not go so far as to send the two cardinals the king asked for. But he sent one of them, William of Pavia, a cardinal notoriously devoted to him. For the other he appointed the

* Letter cclviii.

Cardinal Otho, who had been a friendly correspondent of the archbishop. So far he showed a disposition to act impartially.

The letter to the archbishop, announcing the commission, affords a curious instance of papal adaptation. He is told nothing of any powers of the legates to hear and determine questions in contention. He is informed that the pope, in answer to the king's letters and messages, purposes once more to admonish him, and will anxiously exhort him to mitigate his anger, and be reconciled to the primate. The pope has confidence that Thomas will be restored to the king's grace and affection. Then follows, in words no less courteous, the inhibition of severe measures, which has been made known to the king, but with a saving clause for Thomas's private ear. If the king refuses to acquiesce in such peaceful measures as the pope will sanction, then the archbishop's full powers will be reserved to him, and the pope's authority will support his own.

Ambiguously
announced.

This letter from pope to archbishop is marked, in effect, as private and confidential: "*Volumus autem ut hoc habeas penes te secretum.*" * This policy of duplicity prolonged the quarrel, and was the chief cause of prolonging it. To the legates, the instructions were full and plain.

Archbishop Becket was not to be imposed upon

* Letter cccxxiv.

Becket's distrust of it.

by messages of this kind from the pope. He had his work to do in England, and, like the king himself, would gladly have had the pope's assistance in it; but he was not to be diverted from it by fears of emperor or anti-pope. Moreover, he had no confidence in commissions, and he especially distrusted William of Pavia, and was not singular in his distrust. John of Salisbury writes of the two cardinals, that "he of Pavia has hitherto kept his eyes on the king's money,* not on the fear of God or the honour of the Church. The other is a man of good repute, still a Roman and a cardinal."

The archbishop keenly felt that the conduct of the pope brought his own official authority into contempt. Only a few months before he had been authorized and even commanded to excommunicate certain friends and ministers of the king; and it was left to his own discretion whether to issue his sentence against the king himself. He is now suddenly informed that the pope, in deference to the king's letters and messages, has appointed commissioners with full powers to absolve his excommunicates, who have shown no sign of repentance or submission. At the same time, his powers are again suspended, for no apparent reason, but that the king has been using all his influence at Rome; and he knows well the kind of influence that prevails there.

* Letter cclxxviii.

The archbishop had already much cause for distrust when he heard that the king's envoy, John of Oxford, had returned from Rome, and was boasting everywhere that the king had gained all he desired. He was now exempted from excommunication, except by the pope himself. William of Pavia, whom he had asked for, was to be one of the two legates who would determine all questions without appeal. Till then, all the bishops were absolved from obedience to any command or summons of the archbishop.

Triumphant
return of
John of
Oxford,
1167.

At Southampton,* John fell in with the Bishop of Hereford, stealthily waiting the wind, to obey an archbishop's summons, and forbade him in the names of both king and pope. The bishop knew that the king's ministers would have detained him; but he was for obeying the pope rather than the king. He was surprised to learn that pope and king were in unison. John showed the pope's letter, of which he was the bearer to him and the Bishop of London, who met them; whereupon Foliot exclaimed, with undisguised joy, "Then, friend Thomas, you'll be archbishop no longer." The Bishop of Hereford was less elastic. He died, it was said, of his anxiety between pope and king.

Still stronger reason had the archbishop to decline the jurisdiction of the cardinals, if, as an-

* Letter cclxxxv.

nounced to the king and bishops, they were to hold their court within the king's territories. What that meant he had learnt too well at Northampton to incur the dangers of it again.

To himself and his friends, the case of Becket now appeared desperate. It seemed the crisis of his life. His enemies were jubilant. The prelates and clergy of England, as if sure of his deposition, were failing in obedience to him. Bishops and nobles of France were, some of them, throwing back his co-exiles upon his hands. Before the triumphant attitude of his enemies, he could believe nothing else but that the pope had forsaken him, and gone over to the king.

Archbishop
vs. pope
and king.

He was still himself. As he had spoken before English lords for right and liberty against the king, so would he speak before all the world for right and liberty against both pope and king.

His agent at Rome* is instructed to insinuate into the ears of the pope that, "if these things are true, then our lord the pope has suffocated and strangled, not only me, but himself also and the clergy, or rather the Churches of both kingdoms, both the French and the English. . . . If the Roman Church thus fails those that contend for her, there will be none to restrain the enormities of tyrants, who are now directing all their efforts against the clerical people, and will not desist till

* Letter cclxxxv.

they have reduced them *to the same slavery into which they have brought all others.*" He is to assure the pope that on no account will the archbishop enter the king's territories for litigation, nor submit to the judgment of enemies, and especially of him of Pavia.*

By letter direct,† he exhorts the pope "to vindicate his name against the reports of the king's envoy, and to show that his tales from Rome are false and slanderous; that John did not find the Vicar of Christ the weak and pliant tool that malignant tongues are whispering! but a just judge, no acceptor of persons, sparing none in judgment, impartial equally to king and private man."

In another letter, he entreats the pope to revoke the powers of a legate sent of the king's urgency, and not of his own motion.

To the cardinals he is still more direct. In a letter‡ inscribed "To all the cardinals," he reproaches them with "their love of lucre, their dissimulations, their unrighteous deeds, their folly in expecting to gain from tyrants, through legations and courts of inquiry, the freedom they never yield but to compulsion." He calls on them§ "to do judgment and justice to the wronged; . . . not by false pretences and cunning devices can the

* Appendix, note B.

‡ Letter cclxxxvii.

† Letter cclxxxvi.

§ Letter cclxxxviii.

Church be governed, but by truth and righteousness."

"The illustrious city, which had almost subdued the world," so he writes to a friendly cardinal, "is taken captive, and overthrown in the eagerness of men-pleasing. It could never perish by the sword ; but it has sunk, infested by Western poison. Shame and grief, for through her fall the liberty of the Church in every land is lost and sold for worldly gains. The crooked windings of riches are her ruin ; the mighty men commit fornication with her, to lord it over her for their ambitious ends."

The pope had desired and entreated him * to have no distrust of the legate William ; he had straitly charged the legate, and had received his promise, to use all his powers for peace with the king. Yet, after this urgent counsel and command, the archbishop answers the legate's first letter in terms not within the bounds of common courtesy, impugning both his intentions and his motives. Two letters remain,† and one of them probably was sent ; but it is hardly certain, and there is not much to choose between them. Both were condemned by his best friends, one of whom, admitting the justice of his distrust, doubts the wisdom of expressing it so plainly.

But then his friends would not have struck his blows at tyranny. That was his own work ; and

* Letter cclxxii.

† Letters cccxii. and cccxiii.

that it was the work he had at heart comes out distinctly at this crisis, both of work and feeling, in the tone of his letters, and particularly in their superscriptions. His letter to the pope, rejecting the Cardinal of Pavia as his judge, is indited with "health and ever constancy of mind against the savage will of princes." He calls him "to draw the sword of St. Peter, that the overweening presumption of tyrants may be quelled." Perhaps Alexander, in the heat of his troubles with the emperor, would rather have heard less of the tyranny of princes from Thomas.

To the Cardinal William himself—they might be words of banter—he wished "health and fortitude against the insolence of princes." To Otho, the other legate, he expressed his thanks "that he had never deserted him for the love of kings or the favour of princes." Thus his ruling motive distinctly asserts itself above all reverence of pope or cardinals, and all adulation of "the illustrious city."

These "terrible letters," of which even his friends complained, must have surprised many who received them. The policy which provoked them must have rested partly upon an expectation that Thomas at last would be wearied out, and would accept the legates' meditation, or even submit to their authority, to regain peace and his old greatness. He had held out longer than any one could

have expected. He was not a man of ascetic self-denial. His pomp and luxury had astonished the world. And there was much of the old man about him still, although it had dawned upon him before this that he would have to die for his work. He told his presentiment to the Abbot of Pontigny, when he bade him farewell. The abbot laughed, and said he ate and drank too much for a martyr. "Your wine-cup is not the martyr's cup," was his opinion from what he knew of his guest, who admitted that he did not abjure all self-indulgence. "But God is merciful," he added; "and has revealed to me the end." It needed no miracle of revelation to foresee it.

And yet, withal, while life lasted, he did not renounce all enjoyment of it. We have here one of several incidents which put the stories of his self-mortifications almost on a level with the tales of miracles.

His obstinate resistance of both pope and king was, therefore, a surprise to most men, and is still unintelligible to many. It was not upon the beaten track of common life.

It soon proved by its success to be right at this stage of the conflict, as it did also, at greater cost, in the final result.

Dilatory
policy of the
legates;

The two legates came and spent some months in Normandy. They appear to have had conferences with the king; which, if they had no other

result, saved the pope from the necessity of decisive action till he saw how matters would go with the emperor. The delay was equally convenient to the king, if he could have prolonged it indefinitely. It guarded him from Church censures, and left him in possession of the revenues of Canterbury and of all the exiles.

In the event, affairs turned in favour of the pope's freedom, and of the archbishop's persistence. The emperor had great success at first. On August 1, he was crowned at Rome by his anti-pope, who was enthroned. Then suddenly a pestilence broke out, which spared neither high nor low. Princes of the empire and bishops fell among thousands of common soldiers, and within a month Frederic was in full flight over the Apennines. Alexander and his party overlooked the ordinary cause of the calamity, which might have been expected, and saw another "Sennacherib and his host."

This turn of things in Italy had its effects in Normandy. Within a year of the arrival of the legates, we find the pope adopting the exact line of conduct which Thomas had urged upon him. Alexander complains to his legates * of the falsehoods disseminated over France by the king's envoy, John of Oxford. He sends letters of explanation concerning themselves and their powers, which throw new light upon them to the

till the flight
of the
emperor.

1167.

The pope
regains con-
fidence.

* Letter cccvii.

mind of King Lewis. Lewis, who had shared in the dismay of Thomas, under the exultation of John of Oxford, becomes suddenly loud in his praises of the pope's prudence and holiness and justice, and that he has turned his anger against the disseminators of lies. The hearts of Thomas and his fellow-exiles are revived. The pope is now, "most holy judge, most loving father, most faithful guardian of the Church of God!" *

The "elm-tree conference" between Becket and the legates, 1167.

At length, after their long delay, the legates summoned the archbishop to a conference with themselves, at a place outside of Henry's dominions. He met them on November 18, three years after his flight from Northampton, at a great elm-tree upon the borders of France and Normandy, between Gisors and Trie.† Many of the principal co-exiles went with him, and the French king paid their expenses.

The legates employed, with all the skill they could, their powers of persuasion—the only powers at their command. The dangerous times, the king's temper, his power also, and his old friendship to Thomas were reasons for his being humble and conciliatory, and paying the king the tribute of submission and devotion due to him. The customs were read and discussed, and he was asked whether

* Letter cccxxxi.

† Letter cccxxxi.; Gervase, i. 204. Fitz-Stephen, c. 91, has *Les Planches*.

it would not be wise to accept them and be restored. William of Pavia advised unreserved submission upon all questions, rather than cause so much trouble to the Church. What answer he had may very well be imagined.

Failing to persuade him, they desired to learn his own views and intentions, and even to be advised by him how best to mollify the royal harshness. Thomas knew the king better than they did. He had been somewhat harsh with them, since he found them falling short of the promises of his envoy John!

The result was, that he held to his position. Suffering and poverty should not compel him to stoop lower in submission to the king than the archbishops his predecessors had done. On the question of his proposed translation to another see, he wished the pope to know that he would be murdered before he would be parted from his Church of Canterbury.

Nine days after this conference the legates Argentan. arrived at Argentan,* where the king expected them to enforce measures for putting an end to his troubles. He went out two leagues to meet them, and accompanied them to their lodgings. November 26, 1167. Early the next morning they were admitted to his chamber, where a council of bishops and abbots Monday, 27th. awaited them. Inferior people filled the rooms

* Letters cccxxxix. and cccxlii.

without, and stood outside the castle, speculating and wondering what was going on within.

The scene
there.

What they heard we may conjecture. It must have been a surprise to them, when, within two hours, the legates came out suddenly, hastening away, with the king on their heels, exclaiming in public and in their hearing, "I wish I may never set eyes on cardinal again!" They were not allowed even to wait for their horses, but were hurried off to their hotel upon the first that came to hand, some that happened to be standing in front of the chapel.

We have an account of the contention in the chamber, which we can well believe, for it agrees with what was to be expected. The king had been assured by a papal letter, that the legates would come with full powers to hear and decide upon all questions between him and the archbishop. They arrived, and he called upon them to hold their court and put their powers in execution. They answered him with entreaties first to be reconciled to the archbishop. But "they had not been sent to tell him that;" he appealed separately to the nobles, the bishops, the abbots, his familiar friends, the cardinals themselves. Let them say what was meant by the pope's letter. He promised him judgment; let the cardinals hear and decide with justice; it was the right of the meanest man; he would abide by their decision. They were

obliged to answer him that they had no powers for sitting in judgment; they could not require the archbishop to submit to them. In the first instance, they could only mediate and compose differences.

The king had better cause to be angry than he often had. "His burning rage was something beyond description,"* and did not spare the pope. The pope had betrayed him; he would renounce him. Thus much of the conference we know on good authority. Becket, speaking of what he heard of it, says that the king's language was more fit to be told by the messenger, than committed to writing, which is very credible.

The king sat with the council till four or five o'clock of the afternoon. Then the bishops and abbots visited the cardinals, all with trouble in their faces. Conferences and messages were continued during the following day; and, the next day, the result of them was declared by the Bishop of London, in a great assembly of clergy and laity with the legates. He complained that they had not executed their commission, as it was announced by the pope, although the king was willing to abide their judgment, whatever it might be. The bishops therefore renewed their appeal for themselves and for all England. The king, he said, "revoked his Constitution against appeals. In fact, he had only

The bishop's
appeal.

* "Ultra quam dici possit," cccxlv.

enacted it to save expense to the poorer clergy, who had not been thankful for it"! *

The bishops appointed the Martinmas of the next year for their day of appeal, and put themselves under the pope's protection, while the legates once more suspended the powers of the archbishop. The effect was to prolong the sufferings of all the exiles for at least another year.

The tearful
parting.

For this service the king not only endured the sight of cardinals again, but even shed tears when they took their leave of him on the Tuesday following, asking their services with the pope to rid him of the archbishop.† The Cardinal William also showed tearful eyes, but Otho with difficulty refrained from laughing outright.

The king
duped by
the pope.

In the expected purpose of the mission Henry had been completely duped; and it is not easy to say but that he deserved it. It came of his attempt to gain the pope's authority, without appeal, for judges nominated by himself. Crafty as he was, the Papal Court far outstript him in the game of duplicity. He was a mere child in its hands, and it dealt with him throughout as a spoilt child. With his eyes opened by the conference of Argentan, he sent envoys to Rome, Clarembald of St. Augustine's, Reginald, Archdeacon of Salisbury, and two others, with angry complaints of the pope's vacillation; and with "harsh and

* Appendix, note C.

† Letter cccxxxix.

afflicting demands, and terrible threats if his demands were not complied with." In such terms the pope speaks of his mission in a letter to Becket ; and the Papal Court, laughing at him all the while, with keen satire, proceeds deliberately to throw more dust in his eyes, and to dupe him over again worse than before.

After due deliberation, a letter * was despatched to the King of England, with the pope's answer to the charge of vacillation. "Have we changed?" he asks. "We cannot call to mind that there has been any change of purpose." Then follows a distinct assurance that "he has inhibited the archbishop from issuing any sentence of excommunication or interdict against himself or his territories, or presuming in any way to molest him, till he takes him back to his favour." Henry is authorized to show this letter wherever he will. The Papal Court, always well informed, is acquainted with his flagrant vanity, and deigns to play upon it. This letter is without date, but we may supply May, 1168.†

And duped again, 1168.

The letter to the archbishop, dated May 19, 1168, is expressed, as before, in terms of very different import from that to the king. In the certain hope of his peace and restoration, he is inhibited from sentence upon king or kingdom ; not "till the king takes him into favour," but till he has further

* Letter cccxcv.

† Appendix, note D.

notice from the pope, by which, if he refuse to take him back to favour, his full powers will be restored to him ; and, in any case, at the beginning of the next Lent they will revive and will be without appeal.

Hetriumphs. The king lost no time in publishing what he thought his triumph. The pope's bull was shown everywhere. The bishops were told that they could now set the primate at defiance. He made open boast, it was reported, that he had the pope and cardinals in his purse ; now, at last, he would be as great a king as his grandfather,* who was "king in his own land, legate apostolic, patriarch, emperor, whatever he would. . . Before he received the letter, he had invited the archbishop and the Count of Flanders to a conference ; after it, he was elated into furious contempt of God and men, and above all others of the Romans."

La Ferté
Bernard.
The dis-
closures
there, July
1, 1168.

The pope's letter to the king was published in France under circumstances which might well inflame resentment against the Roman Court. Henry was at war with some of his subject nobles of Aquitaine and Brittany, who were assisted by King Lewis. They made loud complaints of his tyranny ; and we may believe them to be true, whether they had given him causes of provocation or not. There can be no doubt that many of them were in a temper to take advantage of a papal

* Letter ccccx.

interdict if it were issued. Conferences by messengers between the two kings took place on July 1, at La Ferté Bernard,* where Henry was stationed; and here the accusations of his feudatories were brought to a climax by Count Eudes, who complained loudly to King Lewis of Henry's foul and treacherous outrage upon his daughter. It was here that the recent papal letter to Henry was made known to King Lewis, and was thus published to the world. Copies of it were sent to the principal clergy of England, France, and Germany.

In places not subject to Henry, in France especially, the letter gave as much offence as it gave him pleasure. Earnest remonstrances were addressed to the pope and various cardinals by French bishops, by the King of France,† and even by his queen. They complain that the French Church is scandalized: the whole nation grieves that the pope should have suspended a prelate who has suffered so much and so long in the cause of justice. The head of the Church hears from one correspondent after another that the scandal caused by John of Oxford last year was great, but it was nothing to this.‡

The queen writes,§ “ This letter, if genuine, does

* Letter ccccxiv.

† Letter ccccxv.

‡ Letter ccccxvii. See Appendix, note E.

§ Letter cccxl.

The French
queen's re-
monstrance

it not confer on King Henry the license of sinning with impunity ? ”

The remonstrance of Becket himself is more than usually quiet and dignified.

One French ecclesiastic informs the pope* that he has delivered to the King of France a papal message not to be disturbed if he heard that King Henry's messengers had obtained from Rome some serious powers ; and that King Lewis called him a liar for his pains, and spoke—not with reverence, of the Roman Church.

Papal double
dealing.

But they are all mistaken. The notorious letter had really no such meaning as they have put upon it. Alexander and his cardinals knew perfectly well that Henry and everybody else would understand it as they did ; but they had taken care that, in itself, “ when very attentively read,” it had no such meaning, or, at least, that they could say so.

While the letter is producing the effect intended with the king, a friendly cardinal is writing to Thomas† to be patient if anything seems for a time to be ruled against him. In fact, everything is going in his favour, even when seeming otherwise. The pope's letter does not show his real meaning upon the surface, but it will justify all the more the sentence which must be passed upon him if he is not brought to reason by it.

* Letter ccccxviii.

† Letter ccccxlv.

Pope's letters to the same effect are sent to King Lewis and to Thomas. He has heard * "how much they are disturbed and troubled on account of the letter which has caused so much insolent boasting to King Henry. But if the tenor of that letter is carefully read from beginning to end, it will be found to contain nothing that affords material for insolent boasting. The pope has acted as a skilful physician does with a patient he hopes to cure." To Thomas himself, "The Roman Church always proceeds cautiously and deliberately with an erring son; but its love for himself has never cooled; nay, rather it increases from day to day. On the day appointed his full powers will be restored to him without appeal."

A reader of the voluminous correspondence may find it necessary at this point to turn back to the letter † which has caused so much exultation to one party and consternation to the other. He will find that, when very attentively read, it has not necessarily the significance which every one, including most likely the reader himself, has put upon it. The inhibition during the king's displeasure is expressed certainly in plain terms, and in the clearest of Latin language. It looks as if this were its one and single purpose. But we discover, on further attention, that it is issued in the almost sure hope and confidence that the Disposer of

Its deliberate contrivance.

* Letter ccccxvi.

† Letter cccxcv.

hearts will calm the king's anger, and deign to dwell in him and make him peaceful. All else is conditional. Everything depends upon the fulfilment of this "sure hope and confidence." If they are disappointed, it is to be inferred, as soon as the inference becomes convenient, that the exemption from censures will cease and determine.

That this is the concealed intention of the Papal Court becomes still more evident when we observe that the whole letter, conveying at first sight perpetual immunity, is written in answer to the king's angry complaints of the pope's vacillation in the former case, when he acted precisely as he does now.

"Have we changed?" he had asked in reply to the former complaint. "Well, the blessed Paul sometimes changed his purpose, although we cannot call to mind that there has been any change of purpose in this case." The pope, it goes on, had positive information, although not from the king himself, that a reconciliation would be effected under the mediation of the legates; and, therefore, while for the king's honour he allowed the letter announcing the legates with full powers to be expressed in the terms which his own envoys dictated, yet, in his confidence of a reconciliation, he charged the legates, before they left Rome, and in the presence of some of the cardinals, that they must on no account preside over

any judicial procedure between the parties till after such full reconciliation. And, therefore, what he had so done for the king's honour ought not to be imputed to vacillation, "especially as we are men, and may in many things be deceived and imposed upon."

Words could not more significantly give caution, that, whether the authors of them have changed or not, what they have done already is what they may be expected to do again.

With such a warning before his eyes, the king allowed himself to be imposed upon once more, and under exactly the same pretext. It deepens his abasement that his own intrigues at Rome are made the instruments for deceiving him. The pope's letter of which he has boasted was accompanied by one * from a friendly cardinal, assuring him that he has done all he can to obtain his petitions, but the times do not admit of it. He has, therefore, with much instance applied himself in another direction for his advantage, and has at last obtained a letter by which the rash presumption and indiscreet audacity of the Archbishop of Canterbury must be quelled and trampled down. He advises the king to be content with this for the present. He may be assured that the archbishop, finding himself helpless and unable to return to Canterbury, will resign that see, and will

1168.
About May.

* Letter cccxcvi.

seek translation to another church where he can live.

Complica-
tion of
duplicity.

It might appear that we had reached the limits of human invention ; in fact, we are as yet far from the depth of Roman ingenuity. At the very time when the pope and cardinals are devising the means of persuading the King of England that he will never again, without his own consent, be liable to the sentences of his metropolitan, the same pope with cardinals, the same or others of the sacred college, is employed in composing the three usual letters preliminary to Church censures, with a view to sentences by the metropolitan against the king, which without the king's consent he was never to issue more.

Second
papal com-
mission.

A pope's bull of May 25, within a week of the bull suspending the powers of the archbishop, gives commission to two monks, Simon, Prior of Mont Dieu, and the brother Bernard, a monk of Grammont, to be the nuncios and bearers of the second and third of the three letters. It is a mission more suitable for monks than cardinals, and they are to execute it unless William and Otho, who have not yet returned, have success in their mission.

If they fail, the monks are, within two months, to deliver the letter of admonition, exhorting the king to put away offence, and to receive the archbishop to his grace and favour. If he persists in his obstinacy, then they are to deliver the final

letter ; and, reminding him that the sleeping Lord is at length awakened, and the sword of St. Peter not rusted beyond drawing, to assure him that the archbishop's powers will not be suspended beyond the Lent following.

This commission to the monks follows so closely upon the letter, so opposite in its import, to the king, that it becomes a question why that mendacious letter was sent at all, if it was to be immediately null and void. The pope and his court must have had some serious purpose in it. What was their purpose? The well-informed correspondent, John of Salisbury, is able to throw light upon the question.*

The two cardinals, William and Otho, having, as papal legates, fearlessly entered the king's territories, and put themselves in his power, found, it appears, some difficulty in getting out of it. After the burlesque-sorrowful farewell of December 5, they were met by obstacles to their departure, of what kind we are not told. But William is still with Henry and his army at La Ferté Bernard on the first of July ; evidently against his will, because along with Henry's angry complaints to the pope, there came, we learn from this correspondent, pitiful entreaties from the cardinal that the king should be gently dealt with, or else, to the eternal ignominy of the Roman

* Letter ccccxlvii.

Court, the pope's legates might be thrown in chains, to perish miserably in a dungeon.

A deep scheme became necessary for their liberation and safe return to Rome.

We have here an explanation both of the letter of immunity, and of those of caution and commination. They were all on their way together, and may have been despatched on the same day. But the letters of severity were to be kept quiet till that of immunity had served its purpose.

We have also, perhaps, what some writers have wanted, an explanation of the remarkable change which ensued in the relations of the archbishop with the Cardinal of Pavia. We find them from this time in correspondence as close friends.

Cunning and duplicity have been well-worn instruments of rulers in the government of men; and no rulers have used them more expertly than they who for ages have proclaimed themselves to the world as the Vicars of God on earth, and have deceived mankind as they deceived Henry of Anjou.

"Have we changed?" the pope had innocently asked in reply to the king's complaint of his vacillation. "We cannot call to mind that there has been any change of purpose."

A letter to one of two parties in contention announces a mission of legates with full powers, and says nothing of any conditions. The legates

arrive, and have no powers. To the party in question that is a change. Not so to the pope and his court, because the legates were charged with powers strictly conditional ; and the condition without which they were not to act, although concealed from the one party, was made known to the other as the essential business of the legation.

The injured party makes just complaint, and is assured that the evil he dreads shall not fall without his own permission. Presently the dreaded evil is impending, through the action of the very power which promised immunity from it. That, to the party aggrieved, is another change. Not so to the pope and his court, because they were preparing the dreaded evil at the very time when they promised immunity, and contrived that their parchment which bore the promise should, on careful attention, be capable of a meaning the very opposite of what appeared on the face of it ; although they intended, and were well assured, that it would be understood precisely as it was !

“Have we changed ?” The question calls for attention. The essence of it is as old as the papacy. “Have we changed ?” No ; we never change. We are so far above the common ways of men, that we can truly say one thing to one party in a dispute, and, at the same time, another thing just the opposite to the other party ; and we can truly say to either party one thing at one

Q

time, and another thing: just the opposite at another time. But WE are always the same. Those things which to common minds are *lies*, are to us the babbling ripples upon the surface of our universal sway. Our one purpose, never changing, is the stability of our empire; the eternity of our dominion over the minds of men.

Dominion of a world-power, calling itself the Church, pretending "the authority of the blessed Peter," and "the example of the blessed Paul"!

CHAPTER XI.

THE KING'S VAGARIES TO AVOID SENTENCE.

THE first of the three letters, preliminary to the sentences of "the Church," a quiet exhortation, was delivered to Henry by the Bishop of Bellay and the Prior of the Chartreuse. It was near Christmas before the monks could act upon their commission. About that time they delivered the second letter. In reply to it, they obtained a promise of peace and restoration to the archbishop, with the full honour and liberty of his Church, and to be in all things second in the kingdom, on condition of his making his humble and public submission to the king. 1168.

It was arranged accordingly that the archbishop should attend with them at a conference for peace between the two kings, which was about to be held. Conference at Montmirail.

This conference, a great assembly of clergy, nobles, and people, took place at Montmirail,* on

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 92; W. Cant, i. 67; Herb. Bos., iv. 26; Letters cccli. and lxi.

1169. the sixth and seventh of January. Henry renewed his homage to King Lewis for Normandy —what he had solemnly sworn in public never to do ; his two sons did homage, Henry for Anjou and Maine, Richard for Poitou.

The commissioners, who had been increased to three by the addition of Engelbert, Prior of Val St. Pierre, spared no efforts to persuade the archbishop to conciliate the king by profound humility of submission, and especially to give him the promise to observe his customs, without the reservation, "saving my order," which the king would not endure. The King of France and the bishops and nobles were all urgent with the same advice, and cautioned him that any saving clause would only aggravate the royal anger.

Submission
of the arch-
bishop ;

Nobody knew what he would do. Ushered in, with his attendants, to the presence of the two kings, he bent his knees to Henry, who instantly raised him up. "Have pity on me, my lord," were his words ; "I throw myself upon God and you, to God's honour and yours."

The words appear humble enough in themselves, if they do not appeal too equally to God and the king. Yet he must have foreseen what might ensue, and must have acted under a conviction that it was not his duty, and could have no good result, to bow to the king in an unwonted form of submission, under prohibition of the name

of God. At least, he was as competent to judge of what was right and necessary under the circumstances as any of his critics then or now.

Henry instantly boiled with rage. "Proud, ^{rejected with anger.} ungrateful upstart!" He had designs on his throne; he had long cherished them, even in his pompous doings as chancellor. Then, turning to Lewis, "I desire nothing of him but that he observe the customs which his five predecessors observed, and so promise before all here present. Let him act to me," he added, "as the most worthy saint of his predecessors acted to the least worthy of mine, and I am content!"

It was well spoken, and took with the assembly. There was a cry, "The king humbles himself enough!" Even Lewis was persuaded. "Do you want, archbishop," he said, "to be more than a saint?" He answered that he had made promise to the king, "saving his own order," and he would keep it faithfully. There was a cry, "Let the saving clause be dropped." None of his predecessors, he said, had ever made promise to the king without the clause, or any promise to observe customs, and no king had ever required them to do either. As archbishop, it was his duty to make reservation of God's honour. It had become still more impossible for him to leave out the clause, since the Church had condemned some of the customs. Nevertheless, he had never served the ^{His defence of his conduct.}

king with more devotion than he was ready to do now.

The commissioners appear to have been satisfied with his answer. At all events, they had no power to require more. The kings were moving, when they came and entreated Henry to obey the pope's command, and take the archbishop to his favour. He answered them frankly, that whether he ever restored his church to him or not, he would never take him back to his favour, because it would restore him his powers, which the pope had suspended till he received him again to his favour.

It was evening, and the two kings rode away together, one of them with braggings and cursings and abuse. "That day he had had his revenge on the traitor." He thought he had gained King Lewis.

His popularity.

The archbishop's party were sad and quiet till they came to Chartres, on their return to Sens. Here the people had already heard the news. Their feelings were those of the English people. They received with acclamations the man who "would not deny God to please kings." *

Temporary displeasure of King Lewis.

But there was some fear that the protection of King Lewis might be lost, and it became a serious question whither next to direct his steps. It is related † that he was discussing his prospects with some friends, and declared his resolve "not to have

* Herb. Bos., iv. 27. † Alan, c. 34 ; W. Cant, i. 67.

recourse to the Roman robbers, who live on the plunder of the miserable. I have heard," he said, "of a free people on the river Arar, in Burgundy. I will go to them with one companion; perhaps they will have pity on me." The story goes on that at this point there was a knocking at the door, and he was summoned to meet King Lewis, who had arrived at Sens. "He is come to expel us," said one. "You are not a prophet," he answered; and so it turned out.

In fact, Henry had broken the terms settled at Montmirail, under the mediation of Lewis, with the people of Brittany and Poitou, and had carried violence and rapine where he had promised peace. Lewis, hearing of his breach of faith, hastened to Sens. "We were all blind but yourself," he said, "when we advised you as we did." During the two remaining years of his exile, Becket found his friendship warmer than ever.

The monks-commissioners did not attempt at Montmirail to deliver the letter of commination. The king was in fear of it, and showed his fear both in other ways and by a marked difference in the tone of his demands. He made promises—variable, certainly, and indefinite, and, it turned out, mere evasions, as they were seen to be from the first by those who knew him. But he succeeded in postponing sentence.

Still holding to his demand for an unqualified

King
Henry's
fears

and ex-
pedients.

promise to observe his "Customs," he now, time after time, qualified it himself with a promise that if any of the Customs were bad, they should be amended. We have stories (most of them, not all, from Becket and his friends) of his skill in adapting his promise to varying circumstances. To the three monks he declared that anything harsh and burdensome in his customs should be amended by a council of monks, which he intended to summon for the purpose. He got hold of brother Bernard apart, and assured him that he was going with all speed to Grammont, and would submit entirely to the guidance of the head of his monastery. Meanwhile, he would summon the English bishops who advised him, and when they arrived, by God's blessing, peace would be renewed. Envoys despatched to Rome took with them, as usual, violent and impossible demands, but it becomes evident that they professed submission and made promises.

The final
warning,
1169.

The monks waited till February 7, when there was another conference of the kings at St. Leger,* near St. Germain-en-Laye. The archbishop did not attend it, but the monks were there with their formidable letter. Henry made solemn oath that he would not take it, and refused it several times, but took it. He was advised that the refusal would be futile, and might be worse. He stormed

* Letters cccclxiv. and cccclxvi.

at their audacity in bringing him such a letter, but he continued to make promises. He would submit "the Constitutions" to the pope's correction ; he would summon the English bishops, and take their advice, but he would not fix a day for the conference.

Of the second and third letters, one only is Its tenor. known,* which looks like the third. It is very different in tone from the first. It has none of the adulation of the royal virtues and greatness usual in former letters ; it deplores the failure of all attempts to calm the king's excitement, and to persuade him to make peace and restitution. The pope still loves him as his dear son in the Lord, and grieves for the danger that hangs over him ; but he must cry aloud, and warn the wicked. "The king's obstinacy can no longer be borne with ; the archbishop will have power to avenge the injury to himself and his church." "What more the king must hear will be told him by the prior Simon and the brother Bernard, men who fear God more than man. May he be moved by their admonitions to avoid the things otherwise impending, which, without doubt, he will have cause to fear."

The papal nuncios and others agree in their reports to the pope that the king trifled with them a long time at St. Leger, with various and opposite and incoherent promises and proposals. "He

* Letter ccccxliii.

changed like Proteus." They therefore asked him to give them his final answer in letters patent, that they might have something definite to report at Rome. He refused positively to do that, and appeared desirous of avoiding any definite answer till the return of his messengers.

Its effect.

At last, after much pressing, he gave them verbally what appeared to be his answer. He had not expelled the Lord of Canterbury from his kingdom; and he might return in peace if he would promise to act towards him as his predecessors had done to former kings. But his promise must be absolute and unqualified, or he should never enter England again.

They entreated him at least to allow the innocent exiles to return home. On no account would he consent to this.

Proposed
new con-
ditions;

There is a change, however, or an apparent change, in the form of submission which he now requires. It omits all mention of the Customs; and the question was submitted to the archbishop, whether he might not adopt it without any saving clause, and avoid the offence which had been fatal to all attempts at reconciliation.

rejected by
the arch-
bishop.

The new form, however, was still an innovation, and his answer was as reasonable as before. It was impossible for him to bind his conscience by the acts of his predecessors, some of whom, it was well known, had suffered exile as he was doing

himself. On this principal point he was firm ; and he stated his determination to the pope. He was not at liberty to bind himself under new obligations unknown to any of his predecessors.

It must have been evident to him that all such questions were but idle by-play, and that if he had gone through the form which the king required, and returned to his church, the great point of contention—the right of the archbishop to protest against the royal tyranny and to resist it—would have been exactly where it was before his exile.

The king's envoys made their journey with all the boastings and the arrogance usual with Henry's messengers to the pope ; but at Rome it is evident they were studious to disarm and to conciliate. They were able to say that the king, although deeply offended, would, of his affection to the pope, give full restoration to the archbishop ; they created expectations, more definite and positive than were to be realized, that the Customs should receive alterations which would be satisfactory to the pope.

Conciliatory
efforts at
Rome.

Letters went from various quarters to counteract the efforts or intrigues of the royal messengers. The monks-commissioners, the archbishop, the Archbishop of Sens, are urgent upon the pope to act with vigour. "He sees that gentle means have failed." *

* Appendix, note F.

This advice from so many persons, besides Archbishop Thomas, was not taken. The king's messengers, Archdeacon Reginald and another, returned from Rome, boasting as usual that they had gained everything they expected.

Their acceptance.

It is plain, however, that better influences had been brought to bear upon the pope and curia than some we have heard of before. They had assurances of a change in the king's disposition. It was to their honour that they were anxious, if possible, to avoid extreme measures, and there seemed to be better hope of it.* More than once the pope expresses to Henry his joyful thanks for the new spirit he is beginning to show, and prays that the good work begun in him may be performed to the end. At all events, he will leave no means untried for the recovery of his wayward son. A letter† bearing date only three weeks after the conference of St. Leger, announces the appointment of two new nuncios, Gratian and Vivian, both famous lawyers; Gratian, a subdeacon and pope's notary, a nephew of Pope Eugenius; neither of them of high rank or official position, but both of them known to Alexander for their prudence and honesty.

The third commission, February 28, 1169.

The pope must have sent his lawyers with a purpose. It is the most likely one that they were to discuss and settle with the king's lawyers the

* Letter cccxcii.

† Letter ccclxxvi.

alterations required and promised, or expected, in the Constitutions of Clarendon. John of Salisbury speaks of it as known for certain that the king had bound himself, both by word and letter, to carry out the commands of the pope.

For some time after the delivery of the letter of commination King Henry showed intense anxiety and excitement. From the beginning of Lent (March 5) he was at the mercy of the archbishop for himself and his kingdom. In his states beyond sea, the effects of an interdict by the pope would be still more serious than in England. The disaffection among his French subjects was verging upon rebellion; they would be supported by enemies from without, and the arms of his soldiers would be paralyzed. Nor was it possible to guard his frontier against the entrance of the dreaded sentence.

Even in England the precautions taken were ineffectual. The coasts had long been guarded, and the guard was made stricter. No stranger was allowed to enter the country. Every English subject upon landing was carefully searched for papers; but all precautions failed against Archbishop Becket. On Palm Sunday, at Clairvaux, he excommunicated the Bishops of London and Salisbury, Hugh Bigot Earl of Norfolk, Ranulf de Broc, and another Broc, Nigel de Sackville, and four other persons who had disobeyed his com-

Excommu-
nication of
Bishop
Foliot, 1169.

mands or disregarded his summons, who held possession from the king of estates of his see, or were guilty of other grave offence against the authority of the primate.

Scene in
St. Paul's
Cathedral.

Notice was thus given for the utmost precaution against the entry of the sentences. Nevertheless, within seven weeks, on Ascension Day, the excommunication of Bishop Gilbert was publicly proclaimed in St. Paul's Cathedral.* With a friend of the archbishop's, a Master William, looking on, a messenger, Berengarius by name, approached the altar after the reading of the Gospel, and held out something in his hand which the priest took for an offering. Then, clasping the hand of the priest which held the letters of excommunication, he charged him in the names of the pope and the archbishop to deliver one of them to the bishop and the other to the dean, and not to celebrate the Mass till the letters were read aloud. Turning to the people, the messenger said with a powerful voice, "Know ye that Gilbert, Bishop of London, is excommunicated by Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, and legate of the apostolic see." Some of the people were for seizing him, but before they recovered from their surprise Master William managed to get him out of the church, and he escaped. The king's officials sought for him, but he was not taken. The priest refused to celebrate

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 84; Hov. i. 269; Letters cccclxxix. and dviii.

the Mass, but the archdeacon came in and finished the service.

On the day when this was happening in London Thomas was issuing his sentences against Geoffrey, Archdeacon of Canterbury (his "Archidiabolus," as he often called him), Richard of Ilchester, Richard de Luci, and three others. Ten or eleven more were added to the list soon after, several of them holders of the churches or manors of the church of Canterbury.

The sentence was made known to the Bishop of London at Stepney, where he was residing. He called a synod of the London clergy to meet on the Sunday following, when the priest handed the letters to him and to the dean. They were read. The bishop made an angry speech, and not a wise one, if it is truly reported; and the clergy, with a few exceptions, joined in appeal to the pope against the sentence upon the bishop.

Several offences of Foliot's were assumed by the archbishop to be notorious. Their general effect was to bring his own superior authority into contempt. It was one that he had asserted a pretension of the see of London to the primacy. It is stated, but is hardly credible, that he alleged the supremacy of London in the heathen days of the old Roman supremacy. This must have been said for him to furnish ground for the joke, that if he could not be archbishop he would be arch-<sup>Foliot
"arch-
flamen"</sup> flamen of Jupiter!

The archbishop had been prompt in his measures. He issued his censures when the two lawyers were on their way from Rome, bringing with them a letter which would again have stayed his hand. The pope regretted the excommunications, but would not revoke them.* He contented himself with strongly advising him to wait two or three months longer before he issued his sentence against the king. He was not inhibited by authority, but was cautioned that the responsibility would be upon himself. He took the advice and refrained.

Strange
scenes at
Domfront,

When the two lawyers arrived on the borders of Normandy Henry was in the remote parts of Gascony. On his return he came to meet them at Domfront. Arriving late at night from hunting, he went first to their hotel, and paid them all respect and honour. While standing, talking to them, his son Henry arrived at the door with a troop of youths, all sounding their hunting-horns, and bringing in a stag for the nuncios.

August 24 ;

The next day there was a conference,† sometimes quiet, sometimes noisy and angry. The bishops and others, with the king, were kept upon their feet for eight hours, while he demanded the absolution of his excommunicated friends, and launched his invectives against the archbishop. He insisted that this should be the first thing,

* Letter dxxxi.

† Letters dlx. and dlxiii.

and that they should be absolved without the usual forms of submission. It was near sunset when he mounted his horse, swearing, with his usual oath, that he would take another course. "Do not threaten, my lord," Gratian said; "we fear no threats; we belong to a court which is wont to give its commands to emperors and kings."

This speech, arrogant to modern ears, was not so regarded then. It asserted a recognized fact, and does not appear to have given fresh offence even to King Henry, who stood in fear of that court, even when he affected to defy it. After calling in the barons and monks to be his witnesses that he offered the archbishop peace and restoration he was somewhat pacified, and appointed that day week for another meeting. They met accordingly, and again the next day, in the king's park of Bur. He insisted on the absolution of his friends; the legates refused; he ran to his horse and mounted, swearing that never, while life lasted, would he give the archbishop peace or restitution, not to please the pope or anybody else. The prelates deprecated and entreated the legates, and at last prevailed with them to yield in the matter of the excommunicates. The king dismounted, and there was another colloquy. For their concession to him he would grant his peace to the archbishop and his people. But the legates, or one of them, must cross into Eng-

and at Bur,
September 1.

land to absolve the excommunicates there. They refused, and he stormed again. "Do your will," he said. "I don't care one egg for you or your excommunications!" and mounted again and was going. On the remonstrance of the bishops, who told him that he was wrong, he put his foot on earth again, and desired all the bishops present to write to the pope and let him know that he had offered peace, and was ready to do whatever the pope wished, but the nuncios stood in the way.

The bishops reminded him of the letters held by the nuncios. "I know, I know," he said; "they will lay my territories under interdict. But if I can take a strong castle every day, do you suppose I cannot seize a priest who lays interdict on my lands?"

The king
submits to
the pope ;

It was only a bravado to cover his retreat. In the event, he declared his submission to the pope's request for peace; if it was only a show of submission, that, to this king, was almost as hard as the reality. He was bound, he said, to do much upon the entreaty of his lord and father, the pope. "I give my peace to him and his who are in exile with him."

A form of peace was accordingly drawn and agreed to. The next day they met again to complete the settlement. Three excommunicates, Archdeacon Geoffrey and other two, who were

present, were absolved upon the condition that the sentences were to revive if the peace were not concluded. All difficulties seemed to be surmounted, when another dispute arose upon a point which was deemed important, although to modern eyes it may appear trivial. The form, when examined, was found to contain the words, "Saving the dignity of my kingdom." Gratian objected to the reservation; the king insisted upon it. Gratian would have accepted it with a "saving of the liberties of the Church." Henry would not consent to this.

The contention lasted from noon till nine at night, with mutual accusations of a breach of faith. The nuncios accused the king of adding the words on the second day to a form which he had accepted without them on the first day. He accused them of accepting the words on the first and objecting to them on the second; and there is so much confirmation of the king's account, that the mistake appears to be with the nuncios. The saving clause was important if it was rightly understood, under the word "dignities," to preclude discussion of the "Customs" or "Constitutions," the very purpose, to all appearance, for which the lawyers had been sent.

The king and his advisers seized the opportunity of addressing to the pope a remonstrance more creditable to, them than anything else in the long

and finds
cause to
retract.

His just
remon-
strance.

controversy.* He had often, it said, appealed to the pope for justice. Cardinal legates had at length been sent, with full powers, as a letter still in the king's possession clearly testifies. The legates arrived ; the king expected justice, when, to his injury, their powers were withdrawn, and the archbishop, who had acted so maliciously, refused to answer before them.

In reply to remonstrances, the pope sent another letter, which also the king still has, exempting himself and his territories from the jurisdiction of the archbishop till he was restored to the royal favour. Again, for some unknown cause, the pope revoked the exemption, and while Vivian and Gratian were on their way, the archbishop, who had not been restored to favour, launched his excommunications against the king's friends and servants, who are his daily counsellors. On the arrival of the nuncios, who were received with all honour, the king dealt first concerning the absolution of the persons whose excommunication was an injury both to the pope and them, as much as to the king himself ; while, at the same time, in his reverence and love to the pope, at the sacrifice of his own honour, he had assented to all that was desired of him, and had given his consent that the archbishop, whom he had not expelled from his kingdom, should return in peace, and he and his

* Letter dlxiv.

have all they possessed before their exile. The next day the nuncios withdrew their consent, which they had given, to the form of peace, objecting to the words, "Saving the dignity of my kingdom," to which they had no right to make objection. The king entreats the pope to remember the honour he has paid him, and the service he has done him ; to absolve the excommunicates, and to hinder the false traitor from shedding any more of his venom, lest the king, despairing of his goodwill, should be compelled to look elsewhere for his own honour and safety.

There is no idea in all this of renouncing the papal authority. The king asserts his power to choose between one pope and another, and to reconsider the choice he has already made. Between king and pope, the papal duplicities give the king the advantage. Between king and archbishop they count for nothing. As far as he was able, Becket dealt with the papal mendacity as it deserved.

If there was to be no alteration of the "Constitutions," the failure of the third commission cannot have displeased him. No peace could be of value to him or his work that sent him back to Canterbury under precisely the same relations to the king, as when he left Northampton. Concession of some kind was necessary to debar future claim of unlimited autocracy. Such were his feelings.

“God forbid that I should transgress against Him for the sake of a momentaneous peace, and for goods perishable and perishing.” So he wrote after the scenes at Domfront.*

One more step had been made. The king at length withdrew his claims upon the chancery accounts. But, at the same time, he refused to make restitution to any of the exiles for lost moveables and revenues, which had accumulated to an amount almost equivalent to that enormous claim, and were most likely regarded by him as a set-off. What he alleged was, that it had not been the custom of his ancestors to make restitution to restored exiles.† Becket answered that the custom was otherwise, and was well known to be; and in a letter to the king‡ insisted upon restitution, not so much, he called God to witness, for the recovery of their own, as because it was right, and for example' sake. Restitution, when it was possible, was the indispensable condition for forgiveness of wrong-doing.

Such were the prospects of peace when Gratian returned to Rome, after notices from himself and Vivian to Archdeacon Geoffrey and the two others that their conditional absolution was revoked because peace had not been made, and that they must consider themselves under the archbishop's sentences of excommunication. Vivian remained in France.

* Letter dlxxxv.

† Letter dlxxxvi.

‡ Letter dciii.

The archbishop immediately addressed his letters to the pope and to some of the cardinals, urging the necessity of censures upon the king and his territories. "Believe me," he writes, "I know the man; such is his nature that nothing but severe punishment will amend him." He represents forcibly his cruelty to himself and his fellow-exiles and the clergy of England. The king laughs* when the clergy are maimed and blinded, and forced to trial by combat, and the ordeal of fire and water. Accounts arrive almost daily of people imprisoned and flogged and put to death, for no fault but sending help to himself and to exiles, who have borne their sufferings till half of them are dead. And all the while, the king is taking the plunder of their estates and the revenues of vacant sees. Besides Canterbury,—Lincoln, Bath, Hereford, Ely, Bangor, are in his hands,† and how many abbacies is unknown. He has divided among his soldiers the estates of the see of St. Asaph. He invokes the pope's power against Henry's continental states. They are so vulnerable that execution of an interdict will not be necessary, the threat of it will suffice.‡ Towards England he had free use of his own powers, and he sent his notices of interdict to the bishops of his province, and to the abbots and clergy of his diocese. Unless the king gave him peace and

The archbishop's advice to the pope.

Notices of interdict.

* Letter cclxxxvii.

† Letter dxxxviii.

‡ Letter dcx.

restitution, public services were to cease in all the churches from February 2 following.* The absolutions were revoked, further sentences were threatened, and he gave public notice that he intended no longer to spare the king.

The king's
fears.

King Henry, who was in Normandy, showed at once both anger and alarm. He sent urgently for Vivian, with new promises and fresh expedients for delay. The archbishop writes that Vivian declared before many witnesses that the king had bound himself by oath to follow his advice and the pope's commands, in the settlement of terms of peace.† It is stated repeatedly in letters of the pope that he had promised of the archbishop's restoration, with full compensation to him and his fellow-exiles.

In England the measures of precaution were ferocious; they provoked the bishops into resistance, and threw the whole nation into commotion. Such was the effect of a code of "Constitutions" sent from beyond sea to be put in force by De Luci and others. Two or three of these will suffice here.‡

I. The first decrees that "any one bringing in letters of the pope or archbishop to lay an interdict upon England shall be taken and dealt with

* Letters dlxxiv. and dlxxvii.

† Letter dcvi.

‡ A document, dxcix., among the letters; Sheppard, vol. vii. p. 147.

as a traitor." A right enactment of English law, under any circumstances ; yet only a weapon of war in the hands of a king who, when he issues it, is invoking the pope's assistance himself.

Another document details the various punishments by mutilation to be inflicted upon persons so dealt with, as traitors.

VI. All persons, bishops, clerics, abbots, or laymen, observing any sentence of interdict, are to be expelled from the kingdom, with all their kin, taking nothing with them ; all they possess is forfeited to the king.

VII. The goods and possessions of persons taking the part (*faventium*) of the pope or archbishop, and of all persons related to them, are to be seized and confiscated to the king.

IX. Peter's pence are no longer to be paid to 'the apostolic,' but they are to be diligently collected, and kept in the king's treasury to be expended as he may order.

Another schedule of edicts which followed, among other severe enactments, prohibits all clerical persons and all Welshmen from entering the kingdom without the king's passport, expels all Welshmen from English schools, and reaches all the people of the realm by a decree :—

All the sheriffs of all England shall cause all knights, free tenants, and all persons over fifteen years of age within the jurisdiction of their courts,

The people compelled to forswear the pope ;

to take their oaths* in the county courts, and in all cities and towns, at peril of their lives and limbs, that they will observe these edicts; and the sheriffs' officers are to be sent through all the manors of England to take the oaths to the like effect of the people who have not been sworn in the courts.

With the clerical dignitaries another method was adopted.† Geoffrey Ridel, the archdeacon, was sent over, with some other royal officials, to summon all the bishops and abbots in the king's name to meet in London, where they were to be required to bind themselves by oath to these "Constitutions," and to others adapted for themselves. They were to swear that they would obey the king, and receive no pope's letters or commands without his knowledge, and would pay no obedience to any interdict that might be issued, and would carry out no sentence of excommunication against any of the king's faithful subjects.

which pro-
vokes resist-
ance in
England.

It was the result of these arbitrary proceedings to show that despotism was verging upon the limits of revolt.‡ The Archbishop of York and the assembled bishops refused obedience to the "assize." Not a bishop or abbot would promise obedience to it, except the abbot-"elect" of St. Augustine's. The aged Bishop of Winchester made public protest that he was bound under

* W. Cant, i. 46.

* Letter dcx.

‡ *Ibid.*

solemn duty to the apostolic see and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and intended to observe his duty as long as he lived, and to teach his clergy the same. The Bishop of Exeter answered to the same effect, and retired to live with his monks. The Bishop of Norwich, in disregard of a royal command, and in the presence of the royal officers, gave effect to a mandate of his primate to excommunicate Earl Hugh of Norfolk for the alleged unlawful seizure of lands belonging to the canons of Pentney. He then descended from the pulpit, laid his pastoral cross upon the altar, saying that he would have his eye upon those who put their hands upon the lands or moveables of his church, and went into the cloister among his monks. He of Chester took shelter from the royal officers in the corner of his diocese which lay in Wales—a safer place, most likely, than the cloister.

There were symptoms of independence among the lay people also of the land. One noble lady, the daughter of Baldwin of Rivers, would neither swear herself nor permit any of her men to be sworn. The king's justices upon their circuits for the administration of the royal will, made it one of their inquiries as to persons guilty of the new crime of sending money to the archbishop or his banished friends. The Bishop of Winchester,*

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 104.

it was known, had often done it and was not molested. We have heard something of the consequences to humbler offenders. Yet we learn from quite another source, that the justices fell in with a man—we are not told where—who made answer to them, “You tell us that the archbishop is the king’s enemy. We don’t know it, and we don’t believe it. But if he is, we are commanded if our own enemy hunger, to feed him ; if he thirst to give him drink.”*

It is after such transactions that Becket writes to Rome, “In England the pope triumphs, and iniquity knows not whither to turn itself.”† He makes his cause the pope’s own.

The nuncio Vivian could not disregard the king’s request for another conference. A few weeks after the discussions or wrangles at Domfront, he surprised the archbishop by a letter inviting him, in the pope’s name, to a conference of the two kings to be held near Paris on November 18. He sent with it an assurance that the King of England would now submit to the pleasure of the nuncio, and there would be peace at last.

The archbishop, by a severe letter in reply, showed his utter distrust of any good result from conferences. Besides, the expenses of the journeys were onerous to him and his fellow-exiles. But he

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 104.

† Letter dcx.

was strongly pressed by King Lewis as well as Vivian, and promised to attend.

At the same time Henry made an effort to regain the friendship of Lewis. He made a pilgrimage to Paris, ostensibly to worship at the shrine of the martyrdom of St. Denis, and, as he expected, was cordially met by the French king, who gave him a splendid reception. He showed his devotion to the French saint by laying upon the altar an offering of a splendid pall and four-score gold pieces.

In the conference which ensued,* there were discussions of questions between the kings, and after them Vivian opened the question which had brought him there. Once more, and after all, he was answered with evasions. It was to no purpose that he reminded Henry of his promises and of his own efforts in response to them; he returned at last to the archbishop and his friends with nothing to report but that the man was the greatest liar he had ever met with or heard of.†

Conference
at Mont-
martre,
November
18, 1169.

Becket himself waited for the king at Montmartre, and presented his petition for favour and restoration, with promise of all service due from an archbishop to a king.

The king replied that he fully forgave all

* W. Cant, i. 68; Herb. Bos., iv. 28, 29; Fitz-Stephen, c. 93; Letters dcvi. and dcvii.

† Letter dcvi.

offences and quarrels. He had not expelled the archbishop, who might return when he would, but must confine himself to his own duties, and not interfere in the king's matters. He must defer to the king in all customs of the realm.

No promise was required, and the saving clause was thus evaded ; but the admonition contains an intelligible caution.

Discussions ensued concerning restitution, and had not been brought to a settlement when, once more and upon a new point, the conference was broken off without result.

It was the custom of the age, we have seen, that the king, whenever he met the archbishop, saluted him with a kiss. When the royal anger was high at Northampton, the salutation was not given. That it would be given when they were reconciled was expected as a matter of course. It was all the more necessary at such a time as a public token of concord. Thomas, we are informed, had submitted to the pope whether the reconciliation should be declared and guaranteed by some special ceremony, and had been answered that the usual kiss of peace would be a sufficient guarantee. If no other were offered, none should be required.

To the surprise of everybody, Henry made it known that it would not be given. He could never again, under any circumstances, give the kiss to Archbishop Thomas. He had no anger,

he declared, and no ill-will ; but he had publicly sworn in an angry moment never to give him the kiss again even if he were reconciled to him, and he must keep his oath. He had taken oaths in public which he did not keep, but that was nothing.

The King of France, when he heard this, said at once that there could be no peace without the usual sign of it. He would not on such terms enter upon King Henry's land, not for his own weight in gold.

It must have been difficult to avoid a suspicion that Henry's conduct concealed some evil design, and events showed that such a surmise was correct. The pope afterwards offered to absolve him from the oath he alleged, but the offer was not accepted, nor likely to be.

It was late when the conference ended. The two kings set off together for a ride of thirty-five miles from Paris to Mantes ; one of them, after his wont, diverting the dulness of the way with his volleys of cursing and abuse.

Yet Henry continued to show his fear of sentence. It was not long before he sent another messenger to Vivian, with money and fresh requests to him to make peace. The money was only twenty marks, and was offered him probably for his expenses. But he and Gratian had had instructions to take no money from the king, not even for their expenses, unless peace were made. He

sent back the money with remonstrances, and exhorted the king to assent to the archbishop's petition before his lands fell under interdict, and his friends and servants and not a few of them were excommunicate. If he did not listen now he would repent too late, and could not say that he was not forewarned.

Again he had recourse to Rome ; and, as before, when he was forbidding appeals, and was compelling the people of England to forswear the pope, he was sending one embassy after another to gain the pope's assistance himself. Two if not three of his embassies were at Rome together in the early part of 1170.

We know little of their instructions, but they carried assurances that the king was willing to grant his peace to the archbishop. The papal court, under some perplexity, it may be inferred, between his promises and evasions, and the various reports which reached it, once more had recourse to a commission. Two prelates, the Archbishop of Rouen and the Bishop of Nevers, were appointed, with full and summary powers either to settle the terms of agreement on the basis of the king's promises, or, if he refused to keep them, at once to lay all his French provinces under interdict.* As the Archbishop of Rouen was a subject of Henry, and might be unwilling to act, the Bishop

The fourth
commission,
January 19,
1170.

* Appendix, note G.

of Nevers was required in that case to act alone. He was in effect the sole arbiter; the archbishop was joined with him, as a subject of Henry, to modify the severity of the new measure.

It was one of their instructions to insist on the kiss of peace, unless the archbishop was satisfied that he incurred no danger by its omission, and accepted a proposal of Henry's to take it by proxy from his son.

Henry had lately invited the archbishop to a conference at Pontoise, with assurances of a satisfactory settlement. Upon the arrival of some of his envoys from Rome, he suddenly changed his mind, and Thomas with his friends had the trouble and expense of the journey to learn that he had gone in haste to Normandy, with the intention of crossing to England, leaving word behind that if they wanted to see him they must follow him to Gisors. He had also made known his intention to have his son immediately crowned by the Archbishop of York.

He arrived in England after a stormy passage; in which ships went down within sight. The two commissioners, when they heard of his departure, waited for further instructions from Rome. They were charged * to follow him, and execute their commission. If he refused to fulfil his promises, "or artfully and ingeniously prevented their access

Vigorous
papal mea-
sures.

* Letter dcxxviii.

to him," they were at once to promulgate their sentence upon his continental states.

Along with these commands, there came to them the papal letters enjoining all the bishops of Henry's French states to observe the interdict in all their parishes.

Letters went also to the Archbishop of York and the English bishops announcing the commission, and commanding them to observe in all their parishes any sentence that should be published by the Archbishop of Canterbury. His sentence for February 2 had been suspended, no doubt during the action of the new commission. He now issued his mandate to the bishops, that all Divine services, except the baptism of infants and the penance of the dying, should cease after fifteen days.

These peremptory measures had at last signal effect. The two commissioners sent word to Henry that they must follow him to England, to execute the pope's commands. He sent back to them his entreaties not to incur the perils of the sea; he had suffered from them himself. If they remained in Normandy he would very soon be there to meet them.* He had already promised obedience to the pope's commands; he now gave them his formal undertaking, with De Luci for his witness, that he would in nothing decline the form of peace

The king's
full submission to the
pope.

* W. Cant, i. 73; Letter dclxxxv.

to be proposed by themselves.* He thus gave in his submission by a formal document, attested by his chief minister, and allowed it to be published to the world.

At last he was obliged to keep his word. Immediately after his son's coronation he recrossed the sea to meet the commissioners. In view of the dreaded sentences of the power calling itself the Church, which had its seat at Rome, he was compelled to yield, or to make a show of yielding to the pope.

* Letter dclxix.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KING SUBMITS TO THE POPE—THE
FALSE PEACE.

Absolution
of Bishop
Foliot,
February 12,
1170.

IT was among the powers of the new commission to give absolution to the Bishops of London and Salisbury, and others who were under the archbishop's sentences.

Gilbert of London, on his way to Rome to prosecute his appeal, was detained by the king after the conference of Montmartre, when he was informed by a pope's letter that the commissioners had authority to absolve him. Accordingly the Archbishop of Rouen annulled the sentences, and sent letters to the English clergy to announce it. The Bishop of London was declared to all England to be restored to his see, without injury to his dignity, honour, or character.*

By the pope, no doubt, the measure was intended to be a final effort for peace, before proceeding to extremities. How the archbishop might take it was overlooked.

* Letter dclix.

His action upon it was remarkable, and deserves attention. He had been blamed for his "terrible" letters, which "drove the king mad." The sternest of them were mild in comparison with those he now addressed to the pope and cardinals—the most severe, perhaps, that ever were addressed to them by one in their obedience.

The arch-
bishop's
reception
of it.

He writes to Cardinal Albert : * No sooner has he received letters of consolation than tidings come that Satan is let loose. The Bishop of London has been the mover of the quarrel and the contriver of all the mischief. But it is always so in the curia ; Christ is put to death, Barabbas is released. It has been the work of the curia that for six years the English Church has endured calamity ; and his innocent exiles, poor men in Christ, who have nothing on their side but God's justice, have been condemned to suffer, while church-robbers, homicides, perjurers, are absolved in their impenitence—sinners whom Peter himself could not absolve. The very bribes divided by the king's messengers among cardinals and members of the curia are the spoils of the exiles and of the Church. Well, although the cardinals should arm for his destruction not the King of England only, but all the world, if they can, yet neither in life nor death will he fail in fidelity to the Church. God will provide the remedy. For himself, he will trouble the

* Letter dclxii.

Roman Court no more. Let those resort to it who know how to succeed in its iniquities, and come back from it loudly boasting, while justice is led in triumph and innocence is made captive.*

To the pope himself his language is even more "terrible." "The king's envoys have succeeded in their request that yet again he shall be summoned by the Archbishop of Rouen and the Bishop of Nevers—as if he had not been sufficiently summoned; as if his wickedness did not call aloud for judgment. The heavens and the earth cry out against him, and none are deaf but the cardinals about the pope. But even the deaf will hear the sentence, 'Depart, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire.'"†

His motives. It is hardly credible that any archbishop in the Roman obedience could have addressed the pope and cardinals in such language as this, only because he found them less careful of ecclesiastical interests, papal or clerical, or of his own office as archbishop, than he was himself. No doubt Thomas appealed to such motives to gain their powerful support, and to hinder them from throwing it on the side of the king. But these fierce denunciations must have had some deeper cause.

His conduct becomes intelligible when we see that, in contending for the ancient rights of the archbishop, he contended for them as means to an

* Appendix, note H.

† Letter dclxvi.

end, and that his main purpose was not ecclesiastical, but patriotic. His position as head of the Church gave him his seat and his free rights as first member of the king's council. In the council he had taken his stand for English liberties. The papal action tended to bring his office into contempt, to undermine his independence, and to be fatal to every end he had in view in his deadly struggle.

His motives and action were quite understood by the king himself, and were as fiercely resisted, as an impediment to royal usurpations like that attempted at Woodstock.

That Archbishop Becket should, for any cause, have addressed the pope and his cardinals in such language will be a surprise to most readers. It is more surprising that within six months they were convinced that, even from their own point of view, he was right.

Upon the king's return to England "the inquest of sheriffs," * a searching inquiry into all moneys received by them during his absence, was ordered in a great council, and occupied some time.

It was more than three months after his arrival when a summons issued unexpectedly to the bishops, nobles, knights, and "aldermen," calling them to a council at Westminster.† They came, we are told, in great fear, wondering what was

* Appendix, note K. † Benedict I., p. 4; Hoveden, ii. 10.

intended.* The inquest, just ended, appears to have excited an apprehension of royal exactions under pretexts arising out of it. To their surprise, they found themselves assembled to a coronation.

This measure was, perhaps, one of precaution, to secure the succession, if a pope's interdict should have fatal consequences to the king. The emperor had lately felt the peril of papal censure, and forty-four years afterwards the effects of a national interdict were to be signalized by Henry's son, King John.

Coronation
of Henry the
Younger,
June 14,
1170.

The younger Henry was crowned on June 14. The Archbishop of York officiated in chief, and the Bishops of London and Salisbury, lately absolved, together with the Bishop of Rochester, took part with him.

- ~ The coronation of a king, contributing as it did in those days to his security of possession, was the most important office of the Church, and was the ancient privilege of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Some time before this the Archbishop of York had obtained a pope's bull, giving him authority to officiate at a coronation ; but it was cancelled. By a bull of February 26 of this year, he and all other bishops are strictly inhibited from taking part in that service during the exile of Archbishop Thomas. This letter reached the king, but, it was said, was never received by the bishops. The copies of it

* Gervase, i. 219.

may have been stopped at the ports. One correspondent of the archbishop says they were lost with the messenger who carried them.*

The king crossed the sea soon after the coronation, with a view to another conference with King Lewis, to be held in the following month. The archbishop was persuaded by his friend, the Archbishop of Sens, to attend once more.

They went together, in company with the commissioners. It was, as usual, a great assembly of clergy and nobles of both kings, with large forces of their retainers, and met near a castle called Freteval, on the borders of their territories not far from Tours, at a place which it is noted bore the ill-omened name of "the Traitor's Field."† The affairs of the kings had occupied two days, when the commissioners called upon Henry to meet the archbishop, and to carry out the promises he had given.

Strange conference at Freteval, June 20, 1170.

His conduct here is no longer what it was at Argentan and Domfront. He showed himself in the best of tempers, and answered that he was ready to do all the pope required of him, except to give Thomas the kiss of peace; that he could not do; he had refused it at Montmartre, even to the entreaties of the French king.

But he solemnly protested, many times calling God to witness, that his refusal concealed no evil

* Letter dclxxiii.

† Gervase, i. 220.

design ; and he persuaded them to use their influence with Thomas not to insist upon it, promising them that after he was restored to his church and possessions he would then give him the kiss which he would have deserved, and many thanks with it.

Accordingly, they entreated the archbishop not to lose the king's manifest affection and all it would bring with it, by insisting upon this formality.

He was persuaded, and they reported his answer to the king.

The archbishop sent a long account of the proceedings to the pope.* He expresses his joy that at Freteval, to the surprise of all, they found the king so changed that not a question was raised upon which he was otherwise than peacefully disposed. He rode out from the company about him with head uncovered, and saluted the archbishop, who was hastening to be the first with his salutation. He drew him apart, and conversed with him as familiarly as if there had never been difference between them. "Many cheeks were wet with tears, and all present gave glory to God and the blessed Magdalene, on whose sacred day the king, recovered from his former ways, had given peace to the Church and gladness to all his lands."

Their conversation was prolonged during a great part of the day, till the attendants were weary of

* Letter dclxxxiv.

King
Henry's
"repent-
ance,"
July 22.

looking on and hearing nothing. Henry was so meek as to listen patiently to an exhortation to amend his life, and to a historical dissertation in correction of his own opinions.

The archbishop made special complaint of the wrong done to his church by the late coronation. Henry recalled to mind that of the first Norman king by an archbishop of York, under papal authority, and had, for reply, the dissertation on history and upon papal letters. He promised that his son's wife, the daughter of King Lewis, should be crowned by him, and that he should put the crown a second time upon his son's head. Becket himself states that Henry promised full relief to the church of Canterbury, and due punishment to all who had deceived them both.

His full confession.

Some of his friends inform us (what they could only have heard from himself) that the king consented in terms to the issue of the papal censures upon the bishops who had taken part in the late coronation.* It is hardly credible that he intended to surrender his friends to the mercy of the archbishop; but the Count of Blois, who happened to be within hearing, declared afterwards, in a letter to the pope, and offered to confirm it by any oath, that he heard him give his consent to Church censures upon them at the pleasure of the pope and the archbishop.† It is not the only evidence

* Herb. Bos., v. 1. † Letter dccxxvi. ; also in Benedict, i. 15.

that he came to this conference under a resolve to yield whatever was demanded of him, and to keep his word—as far as he might find it necessary—if at all.

There can be no doubt that he gave his word and consent to some action of the archbishop concerning the officiating prelates. It was at this point that Thomas, in the sight of all, dismounted and threw himself at the king's feet. The king instantly dismounted, and held the stirrup for him to remount.* “Why more words?” he said, “lord archbishop, let us be friends again, as we were, and do one another all the good we can, and think no more of our quarrel. But do me honour in the sight of the people.” †

He then passed over to them and said, “If I find the archbishop disposed to do me all good service, and don't return good for good, I shall be the vilest of men, and shall show that the worst things said of me are true. My wish is to be the first in showing kindness and good service.” ‡

Comparing the king in this interview with the king before and after it, it is difficult to believe that he was not playing false throughout; it is not easy to believe that he was false when he thus spoke to the archbishop and the bystanders.

More than one explanation of his conduct is possible; it appears the most probable that he

* Letter dclxxxv.

† Letter dclxxxiv.

‡ *Ibid.*

was not only willing, but desirous to have peace and reconciliation, and would gladly have returned to his old relations of cordial and familiar friendship; but always on the one condition, his old friend must be his servant, as he had been before, and as everybody else was. He must forego his claim, as archbishop, to have an independent voice in the council of the nation; he must know when to desist from opposition to the royal will, however absolute and however wrongful it might be.

The king receives him to favour upon this tacit condition. When he finds that Archbishop Thomas has submitted to it he will be willing, as he was with Hilary, to kiss him not once, but a hundred times.

The conference was breaking up, when Arnulf, Bishop of Lisieux, stood forward, and said in the hearing of all, "Since the king has taken the archbishop's friends into favour, so the archbishop should receive back to favour all who have stood with the king."

It was a plausible request, but it was treating the censures of the Church, by pope or archbishop, as but impulses of a private quarrel. Thomas gave the only answer that was possible to him. There were differences of cases; some of the excommunicates were under sentences of the pope, and he had no authority in them. Others were under his own sentences, or those of their own bishops,

and for various causes. They must therefore be dealt with severally. But he would so order himself that if any remained unreconciled the fault should not be with him.

Hereupon Archdeacon Geoffrey, himself still under sentence, interposed with insolent words, and the king, foreseeing another brawl, desired the archbishop to pay no heed to such people, but to be pacified and give them his blessing and go quietly to his lodgings.

The archbishop concludes his long letter to the pope with urgent advice that the excommunicates, especially those who, relying upon the support of powerful men, have persisted in celebrating Divine services where prohibited, be dealt with according to the rules and rites of the Church. He knows well, he says, that the way he advises is that of labour to himself, but, with God's help, he will overcome it. It is the narrow way that leads to life.

The act of
peace.

The king's formal act of peace* remits to the archbishop and all the exiles all his anger and offence against them, and restores to them their churches and estates. He is to recover, also, all churches and prebends which have fallen vacant since he left the land. It ends with the words, "Saving the honour of my kingdom." It was his answer to a petition, "saving the honour of God and of our own order."

* Letter dclxxxvi.

For the moment, it was a complete surrender, under fear of interdict.

There is no stipulation for restitution of forfeited goods and revenues. The pope had not made this a first condition of peace. Nor is there any promise to repeal any of the "customs." On the other hand, no promise is required for their observance.

The king was thus forced, by fear of Church sentences, into a compliance with words and forms which he had long and obstinately rejected. But that was all, and the archbishop soon found that it gave him no security for the future.

He had hope at first. His letter to the pope begins with glad expressions of success. He had always said that Henry would yield to severity, and his words seemed to have proved true. After all, he was mistaken, and soon had cause to see it. He had not yet learnt, what only such a man can teach us, how far a desire of friendship and an eagerness for revenge may co-exist in a mind of inordinate selfishness and indomitable self-will.

Disappointment.

It was not many weeks before Freteval that the king's friend, Richard of Ilchester, related his master's sworn purpose, never to give the archbishop peace, neither to please the pope nor to please God ; he would die first.* It was only on the day before the conference that he said to King

Warnings of it.

* Letter dclxxiii.

Lewis, "Your scoundrel * archbishop will have his peace to-morrow ; and a good peace it will be for him." Later in the year, after the archbishop's return, he wrote to the pope, "In obedience to your command, throwing myself without reserve at your feet, I have received back to peace with me, and have provided with safe conduct for his return, the man who is my most malignant enemy, whose utmost endeavours are devoted to the destruction of myself and family ; who has always been lying in wait to devise evil against me ; with whom to live is death to me, and to have him living in my kingdom is embarrassment." †

This, it is true, was written after he saw that Thomas was unsubdued.

He obtained the king's consent to his remaining in France for a short time, to take leave of friends, and make his preparations. He wished also to send his officers to England, to resume possession of the Church estates ; and he expected, in the treatment they met with, to have some test of the king's sincerity.

The first expectations of the archbishop were shared by the pope and most of his cardinals. Their respect and consideration for him visibly increase after the day of Freteval. He had been right, after all ; Henry had yielded to severity. The pope almost apologizes for his "apparent

* "Latro," Fitz-Stephen, c. 105.

† Letter dcccix.

remissness. He had wished to overcome evil with good, but his peaceful efforts have failed."

Early in September, the pope discovered his new line of policy by sending the archbishop his censures of the prelates who had taken part in the late coronation, and upon all who had bound themselves by oaths to the "iniquitous customs" (*iniquas consuetudines*), and had not lifted up their voices against them.*

The pope's
new policy.

By these letters, the Bishops of London and Salisbury are recalled under excommunication. Geoffrey, the archdeacon, and others are left to the archbishop. Letters of severity follow one another in quick succession. All the English bishops are charged to excommunicate all clergy who have celebrated divine service within the domains of persons excommunicate. The Archbishops of Sens and Rouen are charged to admonish Henry to make full restitution and to revoke his "execrable customs;" and if he refuse, then after thirty days to lay all his continental provinces under interdict.

Even Becket was alarmed by the new-born fervour of the pope and his court. Suffering, as he already does, under broken promises and fears of worse, he anxiously entreats † the pope to make no mention in his letters of the king's excesses, or the enforced oath, or the perverse constitutions; and to avoid whatever may interrupt the recent

Becket
advises for-
bearance.

* Letters dcxcix., dcc., and dccci.

† Letter dccxvi.

peace. He advises him to issue no imperative sentences upon the bishops, but to leave them to his own judgment, with power to spare them if the sentences cannot be issued without danger of renewed strife. He will issue them or not, as the necessity of the case may seem to require.

He holds to what he has insisted on throughout, that, in accordance with the papal commands already declared, the king be summoned to make restoration of estates and restitution of losses, under pain of ecclesiastical severity. But he would avoid, for the present, all revival of question concerning "the constitutions."

Renewed
fears.

The archbishop informs the pope, in the same letter, concerning the king's conduct since the peace of Freteval. He keeps possession of certain Church estates which he had promised to surrender, and now promises that, if the archbishop show his old devotion to him after his return, he shall not have cause to complain. But "nothing can be got from him except words."

The peace
broken in
England.

The king announced the peace in England, and sent orders to his son * for surrender of the estates of the see and of all the exiles. But the holders of the estates are evidently sure that he does not mean what he says, or will very soon change his mind. Thomas hears from his messengers that intruded persons, and even excommunicates, persist in hold-

* Letter dcxc.

ing his churches, and have driven away his own nominees. Three months after the peace of Freteval none of the estates have been restored, and the holders of them have taken the Michaelmas rents.* They were taken, afterwards, till Martinmas, so that the returning exiles could get no income before Christmas, if they got it then. Ranulf de Broc, the sequestrator of the Canterbury estates, they inform him, is carrying off everything he can from them, and piling up the plunder in Saltwood Castle.† Thomas and his people, when they return to their own, will find nothing but empty, ruined houses and broken-down barns.

At the same time, threats and warnings of danger reach him from all quarters. Broc has been heard to say openly that Becket shall not gain much by his peace. Before he has eaten a loaf of bread in England he will have his life.‡

Threats of violence.

Upon these threats the archbishop writes to the king:§ “If the hatred of himself is to be the ruin of the church of Canterbury, he will sacrifice himself to save his church. He will suffer a thousand deaths, and endure any torments, rather than his church shall be ruined for his sake.” It is no empty bravado. He has many cautions of his danger. His messengers to his estates send him word, in October, to be in no haste to return. “There is not a man in England,” they say, “who

* Letter dccxv.

† Letter dccxviii.

‡ *Ibid.*

§ *Ibid.*

believes in the reconciliation. Everybody avoids us, even they whom we trusted the most, and who had the best reasons for coming to consult us." * Rumours were reported by his friends, and the event showed that they were not all idle gossip. One Richard de Haliwell had confessed to a priest that he had put the royal seal to a letter written by Nigel de Sackville, containing an order for the murder of the archbishop.† Reginald de Warenne † had disclosed, in a chapter of the canons of Southwark, that they would hear soon of a deed of unparalleled atrocity, in which he was to take part against his will; but he was not his own master.

Last inter-
views with
the king.

Two or three interviews between the king and the archbishop, after the day of Freteval, were marked by incidents which could bear only the same interpretation. They met at Tours, where the archbishop was urgent with the king to restore the estates, as he had promised, and was answered that he must first return to his church, and the king would see how he conducted himself. They went to Mass, and, to avoid the kissing of "the pax," the king ordered the Mass for the faithful departed, which omits it.‡

October,
1170.

They had another interview at Chaumont, between Blois and Amboise,§ and conversed together for a long time, again, to all appearance, on their

* Letter dccxvii.

† Fitz-Stephen, c. 114.

‡ Fitz-Stephen, c. 112.

§ Herb. Bos., v. 3; Letter dccxix.

old terms of familiar friendship. The archbishop told his friends that, in the freedom of mirthful talk, Henry suddenly asked him, "How is it that you will not do my pleasure? I would put everything into your hands." * The question expresses his feelings and his steadfast purpose. They were the same at Freteval; they were the same at Northampton; they have never changed. Peace and greatness, everything you can desire, if you will be my servant, as every man in my dominions is my servant. Furious or mirthful, his purpose is the same, and he intends to have it, by peaceful means if he can, but to have it. But Thomas Becket also has his purpose, and it is quite as steadfast. "How is it that you will not do my pleasure? I would put everything into your hands." We do not know what was his answer; most likely silence. But he told his thoughts. They were upon the words, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me."

* Herb. Bos., v. 4.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETURN TO ENGLAND.

THE king had done his utmost to rid himself of the archbishop, and had failed. Thomas would hold his office with his life—that was now certain ; and if he could not be bent to the royal will, it was better to have him in England than elsewhere. The king's pleasure that he should return was conveyed to him. The pope, believing the reconciliation to be sincere, or hoping to make it so, advised him to the same effect. He saw himself that his exile could serve no further purpose, and that, come what might, he ought now to return to his church, and either maintain his independence or perish.

Parting from
King Lewis.

He took his leave of many tried friends in France. The friendship of King Lewis was that of personal affection and admiration, as well as of devotion to the Church, not one of mere policy. "We are going to England," Thomas said to him, "to throw for our heads."* "So I see," was the answer ;

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 109.

“and if you will be advised by me, you will not trust yourself to your king’s power while he refuses you the kiss of peace. Stay where you are. As long as I live, the wines, the bread, the abundance of France is yours.” “God’s will be done,” was the answer; and they took leave of one another with many tears.

King Henry had promised to meet the arch-
bishop at Rouen, and to give him money to pay his
debts in France, and either to go with him to
England, or to send the Archbishop of Rouen to
accompany him, to meet his son the young king.
Thomas arrived there, with a company of a hundred
horsemen, and received an apology for the king’s
absence. He had been obliged to go into Auvergne,
to protect his subjects of that province against the
designs of the King of France.*

Arrival at
Rouen;

Relying on the royal promise, Becket had appointed to meet his creditors at Rouen. He found no money for himself or them, and had to borrow money for his expenses.

The Archbishop of Rouen had received no command to accompany him; but the Dean of Salisbury (John of Oxford!) was there, with the king’s orders to him to return to his church, and to go under the dean’s escort and protection. John discharged his duty with fidelity—to the king, his master, it was said at the time; but we find no reason for doubt-

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 113; Letters dccxxii. and dccxxiv.

ing that his conduct to the archbishop in his charge was honourable to him.

and at
Wissant.

They arrived at Wissant, and there the archbishop paused. The weather was calm, the sky clear, the English shores in sight, and his friends, the exiles of six years, were impatient.* "Why do we not embark?" they were asking. "Are we going to be like Moses, who saw the promised land and did not enter it?" "Do not be in haste," was his answer; "you will not have been forty days in England before you will wish yourselves anywhere else in the world."

He had tidings, upon his arrival at Wissant, that the opposite coast about Dover was guarded by armed men, and that their leaders, Ranulf de Broc, Gervase the Sheriff of Kent, and Reginald de Warenne, of whom we have just heard in Southwark, were talking in public of having his head if he landed there.† He was also told that the Archbishop of York and the Bishops of London and Salisbury were with them, and were encouraging them. Perhaps they were only on their way to King Henry, under fear of censures as soon as the archbishop put his foot in England. The mildest view of their conduct confirms what we have heard of the king's surrender of them at Freteval.

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 115; Rog. Pont., c. 67.

† Fitz-Stephen, c. 110; Rog. Pont., c., 67; Herb. Bos., v. 5; Letter dccxxiii.

At Wissant, therefore, while his friends were impatient to embark, the archbishop had good reason to pause and to consider. He had the pope's letters with him concerning the bishops who had met at Dover. When he entreated the pope not to make peremptory issue of the sentences, but to put them into his hands, and allow him to be guided by circumstances ; when he expressed his earnest desire that any chance of peace should not be lost by unseasonable severity, he little expected that upon his arrival at the coast he would hear that the bishops were on the opposite coast, in company, if not confederacy, with the Brocs !

What, under these circumstances, he should do, was certainly a question of anxious thought with him before he sailed ; and what he did is not a thing to be censured or criticised with levity. He determined to send over before him the pope's letters suspending the archbishop and excommunicating the two bishops. This time the service was executed by a boy. The three bishops were all presented with what appeared to be begging petitions, and were surprised to find in them the dreaded sentences.

He decides to send the pope's sentences before him.

No act of Becket's has fallen more severely under censure, from his own time down to ours. The Archbishop of Rouen* and other prelates condemned it then ; but all who have condemned

* Letter dccxxxii.

it have condemned it as an act of war in a time of fresh peace.

His motives. He knew what they did not—that the peace was illusory, and that enemies upon the coast in sight were waiting to take his life. Critics of his conduct, who think they can judge better than he did of what was necessary and prudent in such a crisis, are bound, however, to judge of it as an act of war in war.

It is also to be taken into account that after all the sufferings of six years, the contest had turned against him. The king was as much resolved as ever to degrade the archbishop into a servant. The Constitutions were unaltered, although the interdict had saved him from promise of observing them. The bishops who had set him at defiance and, as far as they could, had brought his office into contempt, were waiting where they expected him to land, and their very presence flouted him with the failure of all his efforts.

He might well reflect that, if failure were not to be the end of all, he must strike at those bishops, though he should die for it. He said to Herbert, before he sailed, that he was going to his death.*

He knew well that Henry would be exasperated by his service of the sentences! he knew that the bold act would be dangerous to himself; but his cause had been more to him throughout than any

* Herbert himself, v. 5.

thought of self. It was vital to his cause that England and the world should know that he had not succumbed, but would maintain his independence after his return, as he had maintained it to the last day at Northampton.

That his prompt severity became the occasion of fresh troubles to him ; that, if treachery was intended, he opened the door for it ; that while he increased his danger he furnished pleas for traducers,—these things are plain enough, and he could see them as well as we can. But they are personal considerations, and therefore, now as always, of secondary import to him.

That they were of minor import—that they were not his ruling motives—it is no evidence that he was ambitious to be a martyr. Is it imagined, when he is thus judged, that he foresaw the popular pilgrim-worship of the centuries following, and was fascinated by it? If he could have foreseen it all, it is a just inference from all we know of him—all the posthumous honours of St. Thomas of Canterbury would no more have diverted him to the right or left than all he suffered from the frantic self-will of the despot-king.

No ! He was one of those, few perhaps, who set little value upon the opinions of men concerning them, either in life or after death. His whole life, every manifestation of his earnest, transparent mind—so transparent that writers of English

Not a candidate for martyrdom.

history cannot see through it—shows plainly that his was not the mind that desires martyrdom. He would rather have carried the world along with him by his will and wisdom than have died for it. Yet he could die, too, if die he must ; for there were things he valued more than life.

The landing
at Sandwich.

Acclama-
tions of the
people ;

He was at Wissant when his boy-messenger was delivering the papal sentences into the hands of the bishops at Dover. He heard of the commotion that ensued, and directed his course, not as he had intended to Dover, but to his own town of Sandwich. Broc and his companions hastened to meet him there. There, on December 1, the people saw his ship coming to land,* with his cross erect upon the prow, and himself beneath it. The poor people—this is particularly noted—gathered quickly in a crowd to receive him, pressing into the water, wailing for joy, with cries of blessing upon “the father of orphans, the judge of widows,” and knelt for his blessing upon themselves.

Broc and his company would have laid hands on him, but John of Oxford sternly cautioned them against conduct which would bring disgrace upon the king ; and the concourse of people, some of them armed, had its effect in hindering the violence which, to all appearance, was intended.

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 116 ; Herb. Bos., v. 6 ; Letters dcccxxiii. and dcccxxiv.

The next day, he went on to Canterbury,* through crowded roads, and villages pouring out their processions of priests and people, singing, weeping, acclaiming, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." The thirteen miles were barely accomplished within the December daylight. At Canterbury he was met by the monks and clergy and "all the people." The cathedral was splendidly decorated; a great public feast was prepared; the loud sounds of organs and voices filled the church as he entered it, and still louder resounded in the air without from the city trumpets and the shouts of the people. He was received, it was said, as an angel of God.†

In the church, it is related, his fine countenance glowed with emotion. Some who looked on him said that they understood the glory of the face of Moses. He prostrated himself in prayer, gave the kiss of peace to every brother of his monastery, and preached from the text, "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." It was a sermon that deeply affected the crowded audience.

The monks, as might be expected, had been divided among themselves during his exile. Some said, "I am a king's man," some held with their abbot and archbishop. His friends had complained

* W. Cant, ii. 9; Fitz-Stephen, c. 117; Herb. Bos., v. 7.

† Benedict, i. p. 9.

that they did not assist him, as they might have done. He sought peace at least with the brethren of his house.

King's
officers re-
quire him to
absolve the
bishops.

Soon after his arrival at Canterbury he received a visit from some officials, insisting, in the king's name, that he should absolve the bishops. The sentences upon them, they said, were injurious to the king and subversive of the customs of the kingdom. He replied that it was in no man's power to rescind the sentences of the pope. Their clamours and their threats of some strange violence if he did not comply with their demand at last induced him to say that he would exceed his powers, and, at his own peril, presuming on the pope's indulgence, would absolve them on their taking the usual oaths of submission. The bishops, on hearing this, refused to take the oath without the king's consent, and set out to join him in Normandy.

He is
avoided by
men of rank.

While he rested for a week at Canterbury he found himself avoided by men of wealth and rank. None came to congratulate him or bid him "God speed." It is not unlikely that his isolation may have influenced his movements. He would go out to the highways and see the people there. He expected, no doubt, that the demonstrations of public feeling would put some restraint upon violence, as they had done at Sandwich.

After a week's rest he moved to London, intend-

ing to visit the young king, and taking three fine horses for a present to him. Was it not, that he desired, with the help and friendship of his old pupil, to turn the sham peace into a reality?

Progress to
London.

At Rochester he was received as he had been at Canterbury.* Approaching London, he was met by an "infinite multitude of priests and people." Three thousand poor scholars and clergy of the London churches went out three miles from the city, and received him with the *Te Deum*, plaintively chanted to many "pious tears." At St. Mary's, Southwark, the canons regulars met him before the door of the church, with the song *Benedictus*, and again with the "pious tears" of priests and people. A vast multitude of every age and class joined in the chant. In the midst of it, it is related, a mad woman well known, called Matilda, was heard exclaiming repeatedly, "Archbishop, beware of the knife!" He passed the night in the palace of the bishop of Winchester, in Southwark.

At
Rochester.

These triumphal receptions gave offence, as was likely, to the two kings. The elder king had already on several occasions accused Becket of aspiring to his crown. The charge was idle, but the popular movement was felt as if it shook the throne. It is plain enough that the hatred of races, not yet worn away, came out strongly in this contention. The lords were the king's slaves

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 120.

partly from fear of the English ; the shouts of the populace have a strong tang of hatred to their Norman masters.

Repulse by
the young
king.

Thomas had sent his messenger, the Prior of Dover,* to Winchester, to ask leave to present himself to the young king. He desired to show him that the late excommunications were the pope's, and to explain the causes of them. His messenger returned to him in Southwark with the answer that he was forbidden the court,† and must return to Canterbury and remain there, and make no more progresses with armed bands through the king's cities and highways. He had *five* armed knights in attendance.

He answered that he thought he was at peace with the king, and expected nothing hostile. However, it was near Christmas, and he would return to his church. He first paid a short visit to his manor of Harrow, whence the Abbot of St. Albans, who came to him and showed him much kindness, carried a second petition to Woodstock, and endeavoured to persuade Henry to see him. He brought back a second order that he must return to Canterbury. At the same time he had a private warning from the Earl of Cornwall‡ to take care of himself, because his life was in danger.

His repulse by the young king gave fresh zest to

* W. Cant, ii. 11.

† Fitz-Stephen, c. 121 ; Letter dcccxiv.

‡ W. Cant, ii. 18.

the hatred of interested enemies. He heard daily of wilful insults and injuries. Already one of the Brocs had boarded and taken a vessel with a cargo of wine, a present to him from King Lewis, killed some of the sailors, and thrown the others into Pevensey Castle. The abbot obtained from the young king an order for full restitution. The Brocs still persisted in every means of annoyance. They infested the roads at night and provoked quarrels with his servants. They hunted in his woods, and poached his venison with his own dogs. On Christmas Eve one of them stopped his pack-horses on the road, and barbarously lopped the tails of a horse and a mule.

Public
insults.

On Christmas Day he was at his cathedral, and preached a seasonable sermon from Luke ii. 14 (Vulgate version, "On earth peace, to men of good will"). He spoke of his approaching departure from them. Sobs and tears came from all the audience. Then, changing his tone, he spoke, as he would do, of some who hated peace, and pronounced sentences of excommunication upon two of the intruders into his churches and two of the Brocs.

Christmas
Day.

Meanwhile the censured bishops had crossed over to Normandy, and carried their complaints to the king at his castle of Bur, near Bayeux. Their letters, sent on before them, drove him into exclamations of anger or well-feigned grief. With

The court
account
of King
Henry's
conduct.

U

many knights standing about, all ignorant, as yet, of the cause of his vexation, he burst into loud exclamations: "Cowards and imbeciles that he had about him; curse them! Not one of them cared for all his troubles. He had fed them and reared them, and they had no fealty to their lord, or they would never have suffered him to be insulted, as he had been so long." They entreated to know the cause of his distress. "One man," he said, "a low-born, upstart priest, who had come to his court on a lame pack-horse, who had eaten his bread and grown fat on his favours—one man casts dishonour on the king and all his family, and lifts up his heel against the kingdom; and they look on idly, and take no revenge."

These were not words to fall unheeded on the ears of the men about him. They were fiery sparks falling on a sun-dried prairie. The knights who heard them fell into hot words among themselves. The king was still more excited by the arrival of the three bishops. He heard their complaints again. "He will never have a day's peace," said one of them, "as long as Thomas lives." Very like a suggestion of murder from the men of peace!

Plots.

The barons and knights of the royal household were discussing among themselves the king's distress, and held a conference on Christmas Eve, when a company of them bound themselves, according to some accounts with the king's know-

ledge, in oaths of vengeance against Becket and fidelity to the king and to one another, and hastened immediately to the sea-coast. Some of them crossed, without delay, to the English ports, some remained in the coast towns of Flanders. All were determined to seize Becket if he came nigh them.

Of those who crossed the Channel, four names, with that of a fifth, whom they found with the Brocs, have borne the infamy of what followed. Fitzurse, Morville, Tracy, and Briton crossed the sea. They were the most forward, possibly the most unscrupulous, of the king's men, but they were only four of many who were ready for any deed of violence against his "enemy." They were all men of family and estate, as well as of influence about the king.

These four concerted together, and arrived by different routes at Saltwood Castle. It was a castle of the see of Canterbury, still occupied by Ranulf de Broc, who was expecting them. He, or some of the barons of the household who had arrived before the four confederates, had already called out the military forces of East Kent, in the name of the king. Forces were on foot, whoever marshalled them, on the west of Canterbury. The castles of Bletchingley, Hastings, Dover, and others were occupied by soldiers on the alert.*

Consequently, on the morning of December 29,

* Fitz-Stephen, c. 132.

Execu-
tioners.

The city of
Canterbury
watched by
soldiers.

and for three or four days following, the city of Canterbury was surrounded at a distance by soldiers, ready either to seize the archbishop if he again sought safety in flight, or to suppress any outbreak of the populace, or lay siege to the city and cathedral if they were called upon—all for the destruction of one man, a priest.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MURDER.

WITHIN the ring of soldiers, on the morning of 1170. that December 29, the four executioners of the conspiracy, with the two Brocs for their guides, and some others of the same stamp, all in armour, are on their way from Saltwood to Canterbury with a force of men, some of them armed, some carrying swords or clubs.

They arrived at Canterbury in the afternoon and took their measures. The greater number of their men were sent out to watch the city and to summon people on the king's service. It was near four o'clock when the leaders of them, with about twelve men, arrived at the gates of the archbishop's palace. They entered quietly, seized the porter, and took possession of his lodge. Here the four, with one servant, left their weapons and put cloaks over their mail ; they then entered the hall. The domestics were at dinner ; they recognized the men as of the king's household, and asked them to sit

The executioners at the archbishop's palace.

Scenes within.

down and eat. They declined ; they had a message to the archbishop from the king. Word was sent him to the inner room, where he was sitting, after dinner, with some monks and clergy. Among them were John of Salisbury, Fitz-Stephen his chaplain, and the English monk, Edward Grim. The four went on, entered without speaking and without saluting him, and sat down not far from him on the floor, on the little heaps of hay or straw. After a little while, Thomas, who had heard of their landing and must have known that they came on no friendly errand, looked from one to another of them and saluted Tracy. He was answered with muttered curses and a more articulate "God save you," in tone as malignant as his curses.

After a time Fitzurse said, "We have a message to you from the king. Will you hear it in private or before all these?"

"As you please."

"Then in private."

The others were requested to withdraw.

"The king requires you," said Fitzurse, "to absolve the bishops, and to go with us to his son the king, whom you have sought to discrown, and abide the judgment of his court upon your conduct."

"The pope," he replied, "not I, excommunicated the bishops."

"But under your influence."

Granted: and he owed gratitude, therefore, to the Church at Rome. But he had offered to absolve the bishops, on their submission, usual in such cases, and they had refused. He offered it still.

He answered in the same quiet way to their charge of designs against the king.

For a short time he was alone with them; but the doorkeeper had not shut the door, and the words of the knights, getting loud and angry, induced him to recall the attendants.

The wrangle was prolonged.

"You have broken the peace," said one, "and there will be no peace for you and yours. You must quit the king's dominions. You have shamefully cast out of the Church the king's servants."

"Whoever violates the constitutions of the Roman see, or the rights of the Church, I will not spare."

"Threats, threats! You speak to the danger of your life."

"Are you come to murder me? I am ready. I shall not desert my Church again. If I may do my duty in peace, well; if not, God's will be done. I care not for your threats; and I wonder that you dare to threaten an archbishop in his own house. Besides, you know what is between me and you."

Three of the four had been sworn to him as his

men since the time when he was chancellor, and it excited them still more to be reminded of it.

They sprung to their feet, and crowded up to him: "We are no man's men against the king; we renounce allegiance to you, in the king's name."

"We dare threaten an archbishop," Fitzurse said; "and we dare do more. Let us go."

A large company had by this time gathered to them as the voices got louder. Fitzurse cried, as they went out, "We require you, on the part of the king, to leave this man."

Seeing the futility of such an order, he gave the opposite one: "We require you to guard this man, that he do not escape."

The archbishop had risen. "You'll find me here," he said; "I am easy to guard, I am not going." He spoke with anger, and followed them to the door.

"To arms!" They went back through the hall, as they had come, crying, "To arms! to arms!"

In the porch Fitzurse found the axe of a carpenter who was repairing some stairs, and carried it off.

By this time their whole company was gathered to a house outside the palace gates, and some citizens with them, whether from curiosity or under constraint. The gates were quickly opened and shut again, and they all rushed into the court, shouting, "King's men! king's men!" while the

leaders were taking off their cloaks and adjusting their armour under a spreading sycamore tree.

The archbishop had resumed his seat, and was talking with his company. Some of them felt no alarm ; they said it was Christmas time, and the men were drunk. Others were not so sure, and feared they might carry out their threats.

Presently they heard loud noises from the street, the screams of men and women at the sight of armed men rushing through the palace gates. Then there was a rush of servants through the hall and down the steps to the church. Soon there was a crash of wood, struck and broken by axes. The leaders and others with them had come back to the hall door, but the servants had closed and barred it. Broc, who knew the house, led them through the orchard to a window in the ante-room, between the hall and the room where the archbishop was. The house was under repair, after his exile, and they were here stopped by a wooden partition, which they were breaking through. Having effected an entrance, they unbarred the hall door to admit their men, wounding some of the monks who were near.

The monks and clergy with Thomas now entreated him to go into the church. He refused. "Monks are timid," he said. They reminded him that vespers were beginning, and that he was to

Screams of
the popu-
lace.

To the
church.

attend. When he hesitated, they urged him, and almost forced him, pressing him on with their hands. He then ordered his cross to be borne before him. Llewellyn had been sent abroad on some errand, and Henry of Auxerre was the cross-bearer. They entered the monks' cloister, and would have closed the house door, but he forbade them. Once as they went he turned and looked back, but showed no fear or excitement. At the church door he was met by some of the monks, hastening out from vespers in fright at the noises in the street and palace.

It was already dark when he entered the church. The lamps shed their dim light through the gloom. Having entered, the monks closed and bolted the door, and he ordered it to be opened. "God forbid that we turn the house of prayer into a castle! Let all enter who will."

"King's
men" in the
church.

He was ascending the chancel steps, when he heard a voice: "To me, king's men!" He turned, and saw Fitzurse entering the transept, clad in armour, with drawn sword. The three others, similarly accoutred, were following, and others in armour were behind them. The clergy, except three who stood with him, fled and hid themselves, in the crypt, the roof, under the altars. John of Salisbury was one of them. Thomas could have done the same, and might have put himself out of their reach for the night. He neither fled nor

quailed. The three who remained were Fitz-Stephen, Grim, and a monk named Robert.

Then there was a voice: "Where is Thomas Becket, the traitor?" No answer. Then, "Where's the archbishop?" To this he answered, "Here—no traitor, but God's priest; and I wonder that you come into His church in this garb. What do you want?"

He descended the steps, and, advancing to meet the men in arms, came to what was then a central pillar of the transept. He turns and meets them.

"Absolve the king's men," they said.

"They have not given satisfaction, and I will not."

"Then your life; you can live no longer."

"In God's name, I am ready; but I charge you that you touch none of my people, clerical or lay."

One of them struck him with flat sword between the shoulders, saying, "Fly, fly, or you are a dead man."

"Nowhere else," he replied; "here do your will and your orders."

"You are our prisoner," said one; "come out with us;" and Tracy laid hands on him, as if to drag him out of the church.

He seized him by his mailed coat, and shook him off so forcibly, that Tracy with difficulty kept his feet. Other hands were laid on him, to carry or drag him out: there was a scuffle, and he was held by his three attendants.

He addressed Fitzurse : " Rainald, armed against me ! Is this the return ? " Fitzurse took hold of him ; and Thomas, the same in death as in all his life, gave utterance, in his provocation, to the opprobrious taunt,—“ Pander, touch me not.”

The death
scene.

The word gave the final edge to the audacity which quailed before murdering him in the church. Evidently they wanted to get him out. Fitzurse lifted his sword, and aimed at his head, shouting “ Strike ! strike ! ” Tracy followed with the first blow that told. It was caught by Grim, whose arm, raised to save the archbishop’s head, was almost cut through. He fled to the nearest altar.* A second blow from Fitzurse followed, and he still stood upright. A third from Tracy, and he fell forward on his arms and knees, with hands clasped, and, with quiet voice, committed himself to Jesus and the saints.

Not a groan or sound of pain escaped from his lips. Briton gave him a fourth blow as he fell, with such violence that his sword was broken upon the pavement, and was left there. Morville did not strike ; he stood by as if on guard. One of the others challenged him,—“ Do what you are bound to do ; we are all sworn to it.”

All the blows were on the head, and the crown was severed, and hung by the skin. The body lay prostrate, with outstretched arms, and the blood

* Grim himself, c. 82.

flowed, white with the brains. The murderers had turned away, when the fifth miscreant came up, one Hugh Mauclerc, a worthy chaplain of Ranulph de Broc, and putting his foot upon the dead man's neck, scooped out the brains from the skull with his sword, and scattered them upon the flags. Then, "Let us go," he said; "the traitor's dead." They left the church sword in hand, shouting, "King's men! king's men!"

"King's
men!"

For a short time the body lay alone. When it was known that the ruffians were gone, the people, most of them poor people, came in crowds weeping and moaning, and bent down to kiss his hands and his feet. At last the monks closed the doors, placed him on a bier, with the empty skull joined by a cap, and laid him before the high altar, wondering at his life-like face; for he seemed asleep, not dead—his complexion unchanged in colour, not turned pale, his eyes and mouth closed, his countenance with its well-known frank and cheerful look, his fingers and his limbs still lax. So he lay all night, with his monks about him; but there was no service in the desecrated building that night, or for a year to come.

The murderers and their gang turned from the church to plunder the palace.* Chests and coffers were broken open. Gold and silver and money, precious vestments, and everything valuable they

The murderers
plunder the
house.

* Grim, c. 83; Fitz-Stephen; Letter dccxlviii.

could find, they shared among them. Pope's bulls and title-deeds were sent off to the king abroad. The horses were taken from the stables, and the murderers mounted them and rode away.

The next morning one of the Brocs ordered the body to be put out of sight forthwith, or he would have it thrown to the pigs and dogs. It was hastily inclosed in a new sarcophagus of marble, and buried without service in the crypt.

Public consternation.

On the first tidings, the city was in consternation. A deep horror at the deed spread from thence over the Christian world. The name of Englishman was held in loathing for a crime in which no Englishman had a hand—more odious in England than elsewhere.

The young king, when he heard of it, lifted up his hands and thanked God that it had been done without his knowledge, and that none of his men were there.

The elder soon had cause to feel that his fury had driven him into a mistake worse, in tyrant's eyes, than any crime. His first dejection, it was told, was woeful. "For three days he was not able to enter the church, and could take no food but milk of almonds! He was inconsolable; he did not show himself in public, knowing that the savage conduct of his men would redound to his own infamy." Such was the account of his condition given to the monks of Canterbury by two

clerical messengers who brought a letter from him.

There is nothing more remarkable in the whole story than the king's acquittal by most of the biographers of all intention and complicity in the murder. It is an evidence, and one of several, that, whether from inclination or under more urgent motive, if they err it is not to his prejudice. On the evidence it is impossible to acquit him.

The biographers excuse the king ;

The story which has obtained acceptance in English history is well known, and even upon that he was the principal in the murder. He was well acquainted with the men whom he upbraided as imbeciles and cowards and heedless of their fealty. He knew they were not men to take such reproaches patiently from their lord and king. He had had many a proof that not a few of them were capable of any deed in his service. He was not ignorant of the upheld arms ready for anything at Clarendon. The meaning of his words was plain, and he knew it. At least, therefore, when he uttered them he intended them to have the effect they had. If that were all, he was the principal. It is related that he sent a messenger after the four knights ; but that counts for nothing. He did not overtake them, and we know nothing of the message. Hot anger is no excuse of the king's words, and he cannot have even the palliation of it. He had shown at Freteval and at

without reason.

Chaumont that his anger was within his control. He could be angry with calculation, because for policy or self-interest he could smile and flatter if he would.

But there is another account of the facts which ought not to slip into oblivion, although it is true the question is of little importance now, except in so far as the study of every man of any personality or public influence is within "the proper study of mankind."

It is out of doubt that King Henry's part, as a deliberate and cold-blooded principal in the murder, was a prevalent opinion of the time, and was freely expressed by persons who were under no fear of him, as by King Lewis, the Count of Blois, and the Archbishop of Sens.* The archbishop writes to the pope, "What place can be safe, if the rage of tyrants may murder with impunity the Vicars of Christ in the holy of holies?"† He says also, "Like another Herod, he sent the executioners from his own presence."

It is true that these high personages may have been drawn into some exaggeration under the first horror of the crime; but this allowance is to be balanced against sedative influences of greater potency upon the other side.

They had also facts for their opinions; facts which sooner or later came into public knowledge and remain on record. The Archbishop of Sens

* Letters dccxxiv.-dccxxvi.

† Letter dccxl.

declares that the king acknowledged to a messenger from him that he had been the cause of his death, and that he had killed him. It was reported, on apparently good authority, that the murderer Tracy confessed to the Bishop of Exeter that they were all four strictly sworn by the king to do all they did.* A writer of the time, who had special means of information, informs us that it was well known that the Bishop of Exeter believed it.† The cry to Morville, in the death scuffle—"Do what you are bound to; we are all sworn to it"—speak more naturally of an obligation to a superior than to one another.

Even writers who acquit the king of deliberate murder admit that he took measures for the seizure of the archbishop.‡ That implies murder if necessary. To take him prisoner would have meant, what it was to Stigand, "chains and the dungeon pit"—a fate which Thomas Becket was sure to resist as worse than death. To take his life in such case would have been murder, because to seize him was a gross and deliberate violation of the compact of Freteval.

On any view of the subject, Henry was the principal in the murder: the only question is, in what degree. It can hardly be doubtful that he

* Herb. Bos., vi. 9.

† Girald. Camb., vol. vii. p. 61: an authority sufficient for the rumour, confirmatory of the fact.

‡ David Hume for one.

was resolved to crush the archbishop, at whatever cost ; and it appears most consistent with all the facts, recent and prior, and all they show us of the character of the man, that murder was in his thoughts as a last resource from the day when he gave his ungracious consent to the archbishop's return, with the promises not to be kept, and the kiss of peace persistently refused, and that he would have avowed the deed as he did to the Carthusian monk, and would have gloried in it if he could have dared.

The king's conduct to the murderers is confirmatory. He had not renounced the "Constitutions of Clarendon," and could have given signal effect to them by the trial and punishment in his own court of the men who had murdered the archbishop in his church. He was, therefore, culpable for their escape. It was some time before they durst face the world, if they ever faced it boldly again. For twelve months they¹ were entertained at Morville's castle of Knaresborough.* Everybody avoided them ; but some of them at least were afterwards employed by the king. They frequented his castles, hunted in his forests, and lived under his favour and protection. It was said that they suffered severe penances. Those of the king are more notorious and afford a picture of the superstition of the age.

* Benedict, i. p. 14.

When the doors of the pope were closed against his envoys, and the interdict had been issued by the Archbishop of Sens upon his continental provinces, and enemies were expecting their opportunity, we may hope, if his life following will allow us, that terrors within and troubles without did at last bow his spirit in terror and remorse.

He gained respite from the papal sentences by unreserved submission. He made an expedition to Ireland, to be out of the way of inconvenient documents, and remained there six months, till he heard that two legates had arrived in Normandy with powers of absolution. He crossed the seas, and in St. Andrew's Church, at Avranches, swore solemnly before the two cardinals sent specially to receive his oath,* that he had not commanded the murder, and had not desired it, and had been excessively grieved by it. He swore perpetual obedience to Pope Alexander; promised, on his oath, not to hinder appeals; to revoke the Constitutions of Clarendon, and all other customs, at the pope's pleasure; to restore the exiles, and make them full restitution; and also that he would take the cross for three years and go to Jerusalem, unless the pope absolved him from this service, and that he would maintain for twelve months a force of two hundred knights in the service of the Knights Templars.

His sub-
mission,
May, 1172.

* MS. Lansd. ; Benedict, i. p. 32 Letter dclclxxi.

In a sense, his oath may be believed. He did not command, he did not desire, he was vexed to hear that the murder had been perpetrated—in the church.

Abject
penance,
July, 1174.

This humiliation was compulsory, after angry resistance and a week to consider. His abject penance at Canterbury two years later was voluntary; whether, in the troubles of his sons' revolt, he counted upon the effects of superstition, or he really hoped, by his humiliation, to propitiate the anger of heaven. Barefoot, in a single robe of woollen, he walked from St. Dunstan's without the walls to the cathedral, and there, kneeling at the martyr's tomb, he gave his naked body to be lashed by every bishop and abbot who was present and by every monk of Christ Church. He then continued fasting at the tomb all the day and the night following.

The people's
"saint and
martyr."

But it was the English people, the burdened people, whom the murdered archbishop always pitied and protected and loved to succour, that brought King Henry to his penance at Canterbury; for the English people had already declared him their saint and martyr. Their sympathies were quick. As the poor folk of the city returned from the church, and talked together in the streets of the father they had loved so well, now lying dead before the altar, they were sure that the heavens had received him. They saw the mind

of heaven in the sky. First there was a tempest of rain and thunder, and then the darkness brightened into an auroral, blood-red glow. Yes, heaven had taken him up! They wanted no decree from Rome to tell them that. From that night he was their martyred saint.

Their instinct was sound ; a martyr he was, but not of Rome's fashions. The people proclaimed him saint and martyr, although they could not follow him on his own lines. He was alone among men, far before his age ; no one understood him then ; the teachers of England misunderstand him and malign him now. The common people of his day understood at least his feelings, although they could not follow him in his thoughts and intents. Honour and worship him they would ; they could only do it after their own lights. There was an immediate demand for miracles, and there are always people competent to supply every demand.

No doubt it was one effect of his life and death to help to rivet the chains of Rome, and to augment her influence over Englishmen in times following. The Roman court, always wide-awake to its own interests, whatever else it was, saw its opportunity, and made use of it with all its ancient skill.

Roman
policy.

Yet even in this regard Becket's work was good. As yet a better religion than that of Rome had hardly dawned upon the most enlightened minds, since the new empire of the Latin Church, in its

struggles of ambition, had stifled the Church of Paul and Peter under its loads of superstition and formality.

Two tyrannies, the kingly and the priestly, standing one over against the other, and keeping one another in check, were better than one. No tyranny in England has been so odious to its more intelligent people, no memory more execrable, than that of the tyrant, more daring in rapacity than Henry II., who had the fortune to discover that the priestly tyranny had lost its power over the popular mind before other religious influence had taken its place, and was able to gather into his own foul hands, with the plunder of Becket's shrine and of a thousand others, the powers of both priest and king.

Tyrants and their minions are quicker to discover a people's weakness than the people to assert their freedom.

In Becket it is evident his zeal for the Church privileges was great, but not principally for their own sake. The Church liberties were the only liberties that England, under the tyrant foreigner, had yet remaining to her. The Church, to him, was the assertor of justice and the protector of freedom. In so far as the Church was faithful, he loved it. Rather he loved it always, because he had an ideal of a Church which could not fail to be faithful, and strove to realize his ideal. The Roman Church was not that ideal; it was far

otherwise to him. It was his aim and endeavour to make that Church what it claimed to be, and, with its help, to lighten the servitude of the poor of his native land, and teach her nobles to be men true and free. No man of any age has been more conscious of Roman abominations, none more bold in rebuking them than he.

An Englishman by birth and sympathy, if a Norman by extraction, he showed to the world by his life and death that still, in the deepest servitude, there might arise an Englishman strong in the affections of the people, whom a French tyrant would not be able to make his tool; and that there were certainly crimes which no tyrant, king or baron, could count upon committing with impunity.

It was a lesson they much needed, and Thomas of London knew it. The savageries of the kings, the horrors of the castles, must often have made his flesh creep during his boyhood. As chancellor, he took a leading part in crushing the tyranny of the many lords. As archbishop, he stood for the people's rights, as only a great archbishop could do it then, against the tyranny of the one.

Writers of English history could not fail to recognize the development of life and liberty in the nation during the sixty years from the peace of Wallingford. Upon the causes of it they are not so clear.

Hallam,
Stubbs, etc.

Of the peaceful settlement after the anarchy, they have given the credit to the young man "of the tyrant's blood," whose capacity for it may be estimated by what we have seen of him. But the settlement was well begun before he arrived, and was accomplished by the same head which had also been active in the peace.

Of the continued progress during the half-century following, they assign the origins to enactments for the punishment of crime. But penal laws, or any laws, or the administration of them, never made a nation. The best of laws have been enacted in the worst of times and have not amended them.

The great advancement between the day of Wallingford and the day of Runnymede was not in the laws of England, but in the men. The men of Runnymede are like men of another race from the men of Clarendon and Northampton. Richard de Luci made the penal laws, but THOMAS BECKET MADE THE MEN.

The peaceful settlement after the anarchy was the work of his life ; the creation of the new England of his death. The Aurora of the night of his murder was the dawn of a new day after a very dark night.*

The martyr
patriot.

And, therefore, he was truly a martyr—a martyr not for clerical rights or supremacy ; not for any

* Appendix, note L.

Church, either of Rome or England, against the State or its king ; not for any confession of faith, however sacred. Not for these ; but for something even more than them all. He lived and died for liberty and justice and charity to all citizens. He died because he claimed as archbishop, and refused to cede, what is the essential right of every reasonable being, but had been lost to all others except himself—the right to employ freely his own faculties in his own works for the common benefit of men, and to teach other men to do the same.

It was truly to be a martyr for God, who makes every step of human progress dependent upon the wise employment of the human faculties. It was to be a martyr for the religion which teaches to honour all men, and therefore would have men worthy of honour, and not contemptible ; and calls to social duties between man and man, which, without the wise employment of the general intelligence, are in the intricacies of human life impossible.

Thomas was not a saint ; but he was a martyr in a martyrdom worthy and noble as that of any saint.

The people felt it, though they but dimly saw it.

Despite the ignorance and the superstition of the worship they paid him, no Englishman was ever more beloved in life, none has been so long or so fervently honoured after his death, as the man

who, for three and a half centuries and more, was worshipped in England and the Christian world, and, in ignorant parts of it, is worshipped still—not as what he was, and will yet be known with higher honour than before, and more his own, THOMAS BECKET, THE FIRST GREAT PATRIOT OF THE SECOND ENGLAND, but as **St. Thomas of Canterbury.**

APPENDIX.

NOTE A (p. 194).

THE most remarkable expression of opinion upon "the public excommunication" of some of "the leading nobles and king's ministers," and "the threats against himself and his kingdom," occurs in a letter of appeal * to the pope in the name of the bishops and clergy of the province of Canterbury. They were convened by the king for the purpose, and the value of their appeal may be estimated by its description of King Henry as a man most Christian in faith, most honourable in the bonds of chaste matrimony, and a strict maintainer of peace and justice! It also declares that he humbly and reverently, and without any anger, submits himself and his kingdom to the pope's correction!

The credit of this character of King Henry was given to Bishop Foliot, and it agrees exactly in tone and substance with a long letter of Foliot's † to the archbishop. We learn from this that "the king's sweet pledges, and his most noble and honest wife, his many subject kingdoms and other precious possessions, avail

* Letter cciv.

† Letter ccxxv.

nothing to hinder him, despising all, from going naked to follow his Lord Jesus, and bear the cross after Him." This is the letter with Foliot's account of the Council of Clarendon.

Against Thomas it is a railing letter throughout. It reproaches him with his methods of advancement from the first. He had paid heavily to be chancellor. By his promotion to Canterbury the rights of the Church were subverted, righteousness and wickedness were confounded. Foliot himself had only submitted to circumstances, and because "the lion roared." He now speaks freely, without fear of "the lion." He goes on to declare that the career of Thomas as archbishop has been "what was to be expected from a beginning so defiant of right and holiness and canon law."

So he wrote, but his acts were more cautious than his words. He had already, upon the archbishop's injunction, resigned the sequestrations of the exiled clergy * of which the king had put him in charge, and paid over all moneys in his hands belonging to them.

What others thought of these letters of Foliot and the bishops has come down to us on the trustworthy evidence of John of Salisbury, afterwards Bishop of Chartres, one of the best-informed and most judicious of Becket's friends. "You talk," he writes, "of the piety and gentleness, the justice and courtesy and deference to the pope, of a man of whom there is nothing too impious before God or too inhuman to men but Frenchmen and Italians can believe it of him. People ask, amazed, with what conscience, with what shameless audacity, you dare assert innocence of life in a man whose acts of injustice and violence are the byword of the world." †

* Fitz-Stephen, i. 75; Letter clxvii.

† Letter cclii.

The archbishop himself makes answer to the long roll of reproaches from his past life.* Was his family not of noble blood, like those of some late archbishops? Well! he would rather be noble by conduct than bring discredit on an inherited nobility. Yet he was not of mean origin. His father and his forefathers had been citizens of credit in the city of London, and he was himself largely endowed with preferments before he entered the service of the king. His election to Canterbury was regular and uncontested, and obtained universal assent and applause. His resistance of the king had been forced upon him; and he had acted for the king's honour, and in no spirit of opposition.

To a reproach for his flight from Northampton, he makes answer that wrongs were done which he could not amend but at the risk of his life, and could not be blind to without danger to his soul. He therefore withdrew for a time, "till iniquity was fulfilled, and the hearts of the evil-doers made manifest." Evidently he is ready to die for right if he cannot both maintain it and live; but he will live and defend it if he can.

NOTE B (p. 205).

Both to pope and cardinals he declines the judgment of William of Pavia, of whom he writes further to his agent at Rome: "Who thirsts for our blood and is looking for our place. We know what the king has promised him if he succeed in making it vacant."

To "a friend" he writes: "Let the capricious tyrant threaten as he will, neither death nor life shall turn us; no, nor he of Pavia, till iniquity be fulfilled, and the load

* Letter ccxiv.

of our present state vanish into nothing. . . . And yet," he adds, "upon the arrival of these legates some footprints of liberty begin at least to show themselves, through the very zeal put forth for its utter extinction."

NOTE C (p. 214).

Bishop Gilbert speaks in derision of Becket's answer to the king's claim against him for forty-four thousand marks; "As if debts were remitted upon promotion, like sins in baptism." He ignores the full discharge given him at that time "upon the word of a king."

NOTE D (p. 215).

We may safely supply May, 1168, not far from the date of the letter to the archbishop. It was newly received when it was divulged on July 1 at La Ferté Bernard.

NOTE E (p. 217).

John of Salisbury, writing to the Bishop of Poitiers, expresses the feelings of many letters from all kinds of people. "It will be written in the annals of Rome that the defender of liberty and justice, after four years of exile with a crowd of innocent people, his co-exiles, has been suspended from his office as a criminal, not because he deserved it, but to please a tyrant."

NOTE F (p. 235)

A singular remonstrance was at this time addressed to the head of the Church by two French monks, an abbot

and a prior.* “If the pope continue to dissemble,” they write, “he will do still more harm than he has done already. His former letters containing his apparent assent to the king’s petitions, although really concealing within them his benevolent purpose to the archbishop, gave great offence to the French king and to many people. He must now act with the apostolic authority so long suspended. The sword of Peter will give peace to the Church; it would have given it before.” They entreat the pope “to dissemble no longer, but follow up his letter of commination, which all the world applauds.”

NOTE G (p. 256).

They are to make their way with all speed to the king, and insist on his fulfilling all his promises. If he refuse, then, within forty days and without appeal, they are to lay under interdict all his provinces on that side of the sea, forbidding the celebration of all Divine offices, except the baptism of infants and the penance of the dying. If peace be made, then, after a short interval at their discretion, they are to admonish him to make restitution to the exiles and repeal all his perverse customs, those especially which have lately been added to them; if he refuse, they are to report with all speed what alterations he will allow, and to what extent make restitution.†

NOTE H (p. 262).

He writes in similar terms to Gratian, and adds, “All men are encouraged to do the will of a king who thus lords it over the apostolic see, and whose messengers always return triumphant.”‡

* Letter cccclxxi. † Letter dcxxiii. ‡ Letter dclxiii.

The co-exiles also addressed their complaints to some of the cardinals.

NOTE K (p. 263).

He had not cast eyes on English home or castle for four years ; yet writers of history expect us to believe that he returned after his long absences brimming over with schemes of reform for the benefit of his people.

It is more likely, in connection with all we know for certain, that he had thought very little of the people of his island kingdom during his absence from it, except as to how much money they sent him, and whether things were going well for future supplies, and how he was to tread down the man who had shown a spirit which might curtail them.

Reform, it is certain, was sorely wanted, whether we accept literally or not the accounts given him that all parts of the country were ringing with complaints of excessive and wrongful extortions by the sheriffs.

Whatever information he may have had of public wrongs, it is clear that there was suspicion of frauds upon the exchequer. A few weeks after his return he dismissed all the sheriffs from their offices, and, with the assent of a great council, sent out a commission of itinerant barons of the exchequer to make searching inquiry into all moneys received by the sheriffs or their officials upon any claims whatsoever from all hundreds, manors, and persons, during the king's late absence from the realm. Particular attention was directed to an aid they had levied, according to feudal custom, upon the marriage of the king's eldest daughter.

The inquisition was extended to all moneys received, during the same time by the great lords of the land, lay

and clerical, from their subject people. Special instruction is given for inquiry into all payments by way of hush-money.

A few of the sheriffs, upon clearing themselves, or giving satisfaction, were reinstated; in other cases the office was filled with men of a lower class, soldiers or lawyers, more dependent upon the king; and it is in accordance with all we know of the times that the new men are said to have proved still more oppressive and extortionate than those they displaced.

The duties of the commission were prescribed with all the exactness usual in money questions under the administration of affairs by De Luci.

NOTE L (p. 312).

Let a visitor to London, after his amazement at the army of monstrosities in marble of Westminster Abbey take his stand upon the bridge, and he will see in "St. Thomas's Hospital" a nobler monument to a greater patriot, than any he has looked at in the church.

This modern erection has replaced the old hospital. Within ten years of his murder, his adversary Foliot sent his letters to the churches of London, promising indulgence from twenty days of penance to all their parishioners who should contribute to the hospital then in building "to the honour of the blessed Thomas the Martyr" and for the relief and support of poor and infirm people.

Another tribute to his memory, probably more sincere than Foliot's letters, perished in the depredations of Wolsey and his master. It was the Abbey of Lesnes in Kent, built and endowed by Richard de Luci to the

Y

honour of the blessed Mary the Virgin and the blessed Thomas the Martyr. De Luci, on his retirement from office, took the habit of the black canons and died in the abbey.

The death of Becket, or any "miracles" after it, could hardly have influenced De Luci thus to honour him, if he had not seen much to venerate in his life.

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THE END.

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